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ASPECTS OF CHRIST

✓ BY

W. B. SELBIE, M.A.

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Dedication



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE CONGREGATION
WORSHIPPING AT EMMANUEL CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE

P R E F A C E

THE greater part of this book consists of a series of addresses delivered at Emmanuel Congregational Church, Cambridge, on Sunday evenings. They were intended not for scholars, but for average Christian people, and they show all the limitations that belong to the spoken word. The subject with which they deal is one of paramount importance to the Christian Church, and has recently come into special prominence in the form of the question, Jesus or Christ? This must be the writer's excuse for appealing to a wider circle, in the hope that he may be able to contribute something for the guidance of those who are unable to study the subject at first

hand. He makes no claim to original treatment of the question at issue, and he has to acknowledge obligations to many scholars to whose writings reference is made. He has also to thank his colleague Dr. Vernon Bartlet for his kindness in reading the proofs and for some valuable suggestions.

The Introduction appeared as an article in *The Contemporary Review*, and is reproduced here by kind permission of the editor, Sir Percy Bunting. The Conclusion contains the substance of papers read before the Congregational Union of England and Wales and the National Free Church Council.

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORIC FACT AND CHRISTIAN
DOCTRINE

INTRODUCTION

HISTORIC FACT AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

CHRISTIANITY is a historical religion. It arose at a certain period in time, and as the outcome of certain definite events. It has a historical Person as the centre of its thought and devotion. Christian theology is the interpretation of this Person—the attempt to relate Him to our idea of God on the one hand, and of human life and conduct on the other. It is obvious, therefore, that this process of interpretation must be profoundly modified by the view we take of history. When the world was young and men naïve and simple in their ideas, facts were facts, and the acceptance and explanation of them presented no difficulty. Credulity was a virtue. But in these latter days, when more critical

and philosophical conceptions of history are in vogue, when the idea of development dominates every department of thought, and environment is a factor to be taken into account, the position is very different. It may be that the facts themselves remain unchanged, but the point of view from which we approach them is by no means what it was, and with the changed standpoint come a changed estimate and mentality. So we have to reckon with a more hesitating emphasis on the historical groundwork of our faith. Though Christian doctrine must always be the result of reflection on the Christian history, there is a widespread tendency to draw distinctions between them, and to substitute, say, a Christ of doctrinal development, or philosophical reflection, or experimental utility for the Jesus of history or of flesh and blood. We are invited to turn our attention to the living Christ and to fix our gaze exclusively on Him. He is represented as a spiritual force operative for and discover-

able by the men of to-day. He is regarded, more or less unconsciously, as in contrast to a dead Christ of history, and we are invited to believe that even though we may not have known Him after the flesh, there is yet a knowledge of Him after the spirit available and sufficient. Now, no doubt, there lies behind this position a very profound truth. It is a commonplace in these days that religion is a life and not a creed. Its vitality depends on present experience and not on memories of the past. Without such experience it is apt to drift into a condition of unreality, in which it ceases to be or to be effective. But experience itself must be of something. It must have its foundation in fact. Otherwise it remains suspended in mid-air, and there is no guarantee of its uniformity or permanence. The tendency to divorce religious experience and thought from fact and history is one that has to be combated at every point.

Like all processes of the human mind,

this tendency itself has a history. It is due to the spirit of the time and to the expression which this spirit has received in modern theology. In one aspect of it it is a form of mysticism, while in others it takes to itself shapes which mystics would be the first to repudiate. With the rise of a scientific historical method arose also a new conception of the difficulty of arriving at historical certitude. Facts themselves were seen to be elusive in the sense that it was not always possible in history to distinguish between facts and the fancies of those who recorded them. This led to the desire to find some more secure foundation for religion. The question emerged as early as the eighteenth century, though in a form and for reasons widely differing from those prevalent in more recent times. The objection to history as a possible basis for religious doctrine was then purely philosophical. It was not the difficulty of obtaining historical certitude that occupied men's minds, but the undesirability, or

even the impossibility, of finding a foundation for the eternal truths of religion in the more or less accidental phenomena of time. To Lessing, Kant, and Fichte the historical element in Christianity was purely accidental, and could only be held to represent religious truth in a symbolical fashion. History may exemplify ideas, but it is the ideas, we are told, that are important, and not the form in which they become manifest to the mind. The form is always accidental. On these terms Christianity tends to become a metaphysical philosophy, and is easily divorced from fact. Scripture history becomes but a sensuous representation of religious truth. The growth of historical criticism and the application of the historical method to the Christian documents brought up a fresh justification for this plea. The basis of Christian doctrine was believed to be not only philosophically unsound, but historically doubtful. Those who believe with Harnack that "the tradition as to the

incidents attending the birth and early life of Jesus Christ has been shattered” are compelled to find some new groundwork for their belief in Christ and for their doctrine concerning Him. Hence the familiar apologetics of Ritschl and his school. The aim of these writers is to find a justification for Christian belief which shall be independent of historical criticism on the one hand and of metaphysic on the other. In order to accomplish this they draw a clear distinction between the theoretic knowledge that has to do with facts and the religious knowledge that has to do with judgments. They believe in the “historic Christ,” and they assert His divinity, but both belief and assertion are held to be independent of criticism on the one hand and of any philosophic interpretation of the Person on the other. They lay stress on the ethical content of the life of Jesus as over against its historical form. But their “historic Christ” is not really independent of criticism. Rather He

is the Christ who is left to them as the result of a criticism with an anti-supernaturalistic bias. And their independence of metaphysic confines them to a religious knowledge derived from faith and experience alone. Their Christ is divine only in the sense that He has a certain religious value for the believer. In other words, their interpretation of the Christian facts is subordinated to a materialistic philosophy and to a naturalistic critical process. This school has done good service by insisting on the importance of value judgments in religion, and of experience in the interpretation and construction of Christian doctrine, but its method is a dangerous one throughout.

Its principles have been carried some way further by modern Romanist writers like Fathers Loisy and Tyrrell. These frankly abandon the historic basis of Christianity in the New Testament. Criticism is by them allowed to have its perfect work, with the result that the Gospels are entirely discredited as historical material. They then

proceed to “ put the ark of God somewhere where the Philistines cannot get at it,” and by a skilful use of the doctrine of development justify a complete acceptance of mediæval dogma. Regarding Christianity as a living organism, they believe that it can best be studied and understood in its later and completer stages. The earlier stage, which consists of a record of events which may or may not have “ gone through the form of taking place,” belongs to the world of appearance which is irrelevant to Faith. As Loisy says, “ Historical researches only tend to prove and represent *facts*, which cannot be in contradiction with any dogmas precisely because they are facts, while dogmas are representative ideas of faith.” It is easy to see the attractiveness of this position for many minds in the present distress, but a very little reflection should be sufficient to show the extremely uncertain nature of the foundation it offers for faith and life.

We must not, however, overlook the fact that there are certain tendencies of modern

thought which go far to popularise this conception of a Christianity divorced from history. The more important among these are, first, the application of the theory of development to Christian doctrine; and, second, the influence of the new philosophy which goes by the name of pragmatism.

There can be no doubt that the idea of development is inherent in Christian teaching from the first. It was no part of the purpose of Jesus Christ when here on earth to leave with His followers a complete body of Christian doctrine or a fully organised Church. In His own mouth His teaching was no more than a seed which was intended to germinate and to grow, or leaven which was to work its way gradually through the whole lump. He was Himself the core of His teaching, and He likened His own life to a corn of wheat which must fall into the ground and die before it could bring forth fruit. It was this capacity for growth and adaptation which constituted the uniqueness of the work of Jesus Christ and gave to it

its power. But if we are to apply to this process of growth the concept of development, we must do so intelligently and consistently. Development must mean here what it means everywhere else. If it implies continuous growth from earlier and simpler to later and more complex forms, according to fixed laws and by means of resident forces, then we must regard the earlier forms and stages as being at least as important as the later and as containing within them the potentiality of all that was to be. It may be that the doctrine of the Person of Christ in the Church to-day presents features which are not explicitly found in the Gospel history; but if they are to be regarded as a legitimate development, they must at least be implicit in the facts which that history records. Indeed, any fair reading of Christian doctrine in the light of evolution increases rather than diminishes the importance of the historical records. In these we have given the historical data whose development we have to study, the

organism whose growth we have to investigate. If the Christ of dogma is so far removed from the Christ of the Gospels that no sort of likeness between them can be found, then the study of the process of development should show us how the divergence has arisen and should enable us to judge whether it is ideally or historically legitimate or not. On the other hand, if the portrait of Christ in the Gospels is judged to be wholly un-historical, no doctrine of Christ developed from it can have any vital significance either for reason or for faith. A myth does not develop into a reality. The bigger it grows the more mythical it becomes. Whatever is implicit in the germ must become explicit in the finished organism.

But it must be freely recognised that other factors come into play in the developmental process besides the forces and characteristics resident within the primitive organism. Environment must be taken into account, and in the development of thought environment has a great part to play. It is very neces-

sary to understand the conception of the historical facts of Christianity which was entertained by those writers who contributed most powerfully to the growth of Christian doctrine. But it is equally necessary that we should understand the intellectual and religious equipment which these writers brought to their task. They were themselves often the product of their environment, and, more or less unconsciously, they altered the truth as it was in Jesus when they tried to give expression to it for their own day. Much of their work, too, was polemical in intention, and this involved a bias which must be taken into account in estimating it. It is much to be desired also that those who study doctrinal development would follow the example of Edwin Hatch and give full weight to those pagan and other alien influences which came so strongly into play during the first four centuries of the Christian era. These are equally important, whether we regard Christianity as an idealistic philosophy or as an historic creed. In

this connection, however, it is well to bear in mind the warnings to which Harnack has given utterance: "A man must be infatuated to maintain that, because all history is a history of development, it can and must be described as a process of material or mechanical change." "In the history of intellectual and moral ideas, the rough-and-ready way of explaining cause by environment alone breaks down altogether."

Once more, the idea that Christian doctrine may be independent of historical fact is undoubtedly fostered by the prevalence of a pragmatic philosophy. There is a superficial attraction about a philosophical system which recognises the difficulties which beset every theory of cognition, which subordinates the intelligence to the will, and judges religion not by the truth of its teaching, but by its effects on life and in experience. When Professor James asserts that "the only meaning of truth is the possibility of verification by experience," and that "true is the term applied to whatever it

is practically profitable to believe," he is laying down propositions which strongly appeal to an age that loves to consider itself above all things practical. And there is no doubt that modern psychology is right in insisting that experience must be given a very important place among the criteria of religious truth. Theories, religious as well as scientific, are at first generally of the nature of hypotheses, and the test of an hypothesis is, will it work? But to make this the exclusive and universal test of knowledge involves a kind of scepticism, the effect of which is to make theology impossible. There is truth in Professor Carveth Read's description of pragmatism as "a kind of scepticism, as any doctrine must be that puts the conviction of reason solely upon any other ground than cognition, whether it be action or feeling." But even granting the admissibility of this new philosophical method, there is nothing in it to justify the neglect of historic fact as the basis of religious ideas. In the case of

Christianity, it is history which gives the data of experience. Apart from the records of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, no real experience of His power is possible. And to say that this experience remains the same, equally valid and equally fruitful, whether the records be historically true or whether they be merely myth and the product of imagination, is to say what no careful student of human nature would be willing to endorse. Whatever may be the case with philosophers, the average man is not easily persuaded to divorce his ideas from what he considers to be facts. If his religion is to supply him with sanctions for conduct and to be judged accordingly, he can hardly be blamed if he seeks for it some basis in reality and some foundation stronger than a myth.

But it is time now to realise that the root of the difficulty that confronts us is not to be found in any scientific or philosophical theories, but in the historical criticism of the early Christian documents. The results of

that criticism are now generally known and have brought about a widespread scepticism as to the historicity of the Christian records. Hence the desire to find a basis for Christian belief that shall be independent of records altogether. But there are other ways out of the *impasse* : criticism must be met with criticism. The false relation between doctrine and fact, which has too often been maintained, must be replaced by one which allows a wider latitude. For instance, it has sometimes been urged that the doctrine of the Incarnation depends upon the fact of the birth of our Lord from a Virgin, or that belief in the living Christ is impossible apart from belief in His bodily resurrection. But to deny this dependence of doctrine on a single isolated fact is not to deny that historic fact is no necessary basis for doctrine. It is merely to assume the obvious necessity of discriminating among the facts given, and of broadening the basis on which doctrine is built. It would not even be true to say in so many words that the Christian doctrine

of redemption is based on the fact of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is not the fact that Christ died, so much as the fact that it was Christ who died, that is important for the formulation of doctrine. The force at the back of Christianity is the Person of Jesus Christ, and our belief in the Person is not necessarily conditioned by the accuracy, or otherwise, of the reports we have received about incidents in His career. So historical testimony to the truth of the Christian origins does not depend on the degree in which we can authenticate every statement made in the Gospels, still less on our power of identifying the writers of the Gospels. We have to see with their eyes and to judge as best we can of the verisimilitude of the picture which they draw. We are deeply concerned with the impression which Jesus Christ made upon them because of the presuppositions which that impression involves, and which emerged when they attempted to describe it. But because those presuppositions present to us

certain metaphysical difficulties, we must not allow these to affect our judgment of the apostolic testimony.

It is too easily assumed that criticism of the Gospels is necessarily destructive in its effects and that it has left us no secure foundation on which to build a doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ. A reaction against the extreme conclusions of the critics is already in process, and saner and broader views are beginning to prevail. Criticism itself has shown us that it is historically impossible to explain away the unique claims which Jesus Christ made and the results which followed directly from them. His work and teaching are embedded in the history of the first centuries of our era in such a way that it is impossible to eliminate them. It is important that we should discover what the first followers of Jesus thought about them, and it is not difficult to do so. Nor is it unreasonable to assume that their opinions concerning Him originated from and were shaped by His own

words and actions, as they understood them. Their understanding may have been faulty, but that it had no sort of foundation in fact no sane person is likely to believe. Here, then, at the very beginning, Christian fact and doctrine come into the closest possible relations. There must have been certain facts given to start the process of reflection. Something happened, and something which was a sufficient basis for doctrine. How easy it is, however, for doctrine to become dissociated from fact the history of Christian thought during the first four centuries abundantly proves. We can trace without any difficulty the process by which the historic Jesus became the unhistorical Christ of fourth-century philosophical speculation. We have here not a natural development from the historical data, but the result of speculation in which the history has been largely overlooked, or perverted for dogmatic or polemical purposes. A familiar illustration of the process is often found in the changes which came over the presenta-

tion of Jesus Christ in art. The devotion of His earlier followers was none the less that they pictured Him to themselves simply as a young man of like form and fashion with themselves. But in the course of time the halo appeared round His brow, and He was presented to the gaze of His followers either in a form glorified and far removed from any vestige of humanity or else as an agonised and perpetually crucified martyr. This transformation was the sign of a corresponding change in thought and belief, which Dr. Rashdall has well described in the following terms: "It can hardly be seriously denied that the picture which the fourth century formed to itself of the nature of Christ's personality was an unhistorical picture. More and more as the historic environment of Christ's early life receded into the background, the key was lost to much in Christ's teaching which, with our richer historical knowledge and our developed instinct of historical reconstruction, we may now hope to understand. The historic Christ more

and more disappeared from men's view, and was superseded by a metaphysical Christ, whose humanity was indeed acknowledged in word, but who lacked all the attributes of the humanity which we know."¹

It has been among the chief tasks of modern scholarship to recover this lost Christ of history. And it is the fact that the Christ so recovered is very different from the Christ of ecclesiastical dogma that has led many minds to disparage, if not to discredit, both the historical process and its result. It is quite true that the New Testament records give us not dogma, but only the materials for dogma. But the material is sufficient and is absolutely necessary for the purpose of doctrinal development. Historical criticism has had some constructive results which are not to be overlooked. It has made it for ever impossible to deny the belief of Jesus Christ in His unique relationship to God on the one hand and to humanity on the other. His consciousness of this and

¹ *Doctrine and Development*, p. 94.

the claims He founded upon it form an integral part of any representation of Him that pretends to be true to the facts as His first followers understood them. They bring us face to face with what is sometimes called the problem of the Person of Christ, with the lonely majesty and unique grandeur of His moral and religious consciousness. It is with the total effect of this Personality that the student of history has to do, rather than with any incidents in His career. In the making of history personality is a force to be reckoned with, and in Jesus Christ we have a personality more potent in its results, both immediate and remote, than any other known to men. Regarded from this wider standpoint and in this more human aspect the foundation of our faith stands firm. To quote Harnack once more: "There is," he says, "a difference between fact and fact. The actual external details are always a matter of controversy, and in this sense Lessing was perfectly right when he warned us against coupling matters of the highest

moment with accidental truths of history and hanging the whole weight of eternity on a spider's thread. But the spiritual purport of a whole life, of a personality, is also an historical fact ; we are certain of it by the effect which it produces ; and it is here that we find the link that binds us to Jesus Christ."

But it is not only in the field of Christology that the importance of history has to be recognised. It is equally important for theology in the broader sense of the term. No doctrine of God can be regarded as satisfactory which is the produce of unaided imagination or of the idealising tendency of the human mind. The science of Biblical theology is a standing refutation of any such theory. There is a history of thought as well as of events, and the history of Christian thought on the Godhead is of the last importance in regulating the doctrinal reconstruction of modern times. The new science of comparative religions and the effect which it is producing well illustrate the point

under discussion. There we have an immense body of ideas and phenomena which testify to the depth of the religious sentiment in man. Christian theology cannot escape the conclusion that we have in these not only man's dim groping after God, but also God's search after man. He has spoken to the fathers in divers portions and in divers manners, to every age in the language that it could understand, and to every tribe in its own customs and in the forms of its own thought. The knowledge of this cannot but profoundly influence our conception of God in these days. It throws new light upon the whole Christian revelation, and gives us a guide to the Scriptures without which we should often go astray. Students of the New Testament know how much they owe to the interpreters of the history of Old Testament religion. And the Old Testament itself is a sealed book to those who take no account of the general history of Semitic faiths, while these studies again broaden out until they come into close touch with the

whole religious history of mankind. Here, as on the narrower ground of purely Christian theology, the historical background is absolutely necessary to the dogmatic process, and whoever is content to ignore it is but a blind leader of the blind.

The question still remains as to the place of experience in the formulation of religious truth. It is only germane to the subject because of the tendency of certain modern writers to make spiritual experience rather than historical investigation their great criterion. The two, however, must not be separated. Experience is useful as a process of verification. By it men give practical effect to the faith that is in them, and are enabled to discover its value for life and conduct. It helps them to apply to their belief the practical test, *solvitur ambulando*. But it does not give them the content of their belief. Its data are supplied, and all that experience does is to subject them to a certain method of proof. Nor must it be forgotten that religious experience itself has

a history. The experience of the individual is only valuable as it is part of the collective experience of the race and as it adds to the volume of the testimony which that wider experience provides. That the experience of the saints of Christendom says yea and amen to the spiritual claim of Jesus Christ is undoubtedly an important fact. But it loses all force and meaning if it is once dissociated from the history of the life and teaching of Jesus. That men studying this life and teaching to-day find in it the same solace and inspiration as was found by the men of the second century A.D. is a striking confirmation of the force of Christ's personality and of the universal nature of His appeal. But it does not prove the historical truth of the records concerning Him. No doubt it may be said that the men in whom this experience has been effective have heartily believed the Scriptures which originated it, and that it is very difficult to imagine the birth of a true Christian experience in any man to whom Christ and His teaching

are only products of the pious imagination. That may be so, but the fact remains that the real value of experience is for psychology and not for historical criticism. The point that more nearly concerns us here is that the history of Christian religious experience becomes largely unintelligible without the historical data on which it rests. Jesus Christ was not merely a teacher like Plato. He exemplified His teaching in His life, and the power and meaning of that life men discover by following the lines which He laid down.

Nevertheless the fact has to be faced that a dehistoricalised gospel is being offered to the world to-day as the latest and necessary product of scientific religious thought. We are told that "religion must withdraw its pretensions to be dealing with matters of fact," that Christianity is a religion of experience born of illusions, and that these illusions preserved "the invaluable treasure of the Christian teaching and the figure of the Teacher." We are told even that without the historical Jesus the Gospels would

become "more wonderful and more encouraging than before, for the profound wisdom and lofty character found in them would prove to be the expression not of a single and unique religion of Jesus, but of the spiritual ideals of many humble and unknown men." This position is set forth as the last word of modern apologetics, and it undoubtedly has its attractions. But the practical effect of it is to nullify the religion in the name of which it speaks. The great need of religion at the present time is for more and not less historic reality. Nothing is gained by telling us that we have the spirit of Jesus even if we lose the historical Jesus. To the plain man this means that you have reduced his religion to the "baseless fabric of a dream." It means also the substitution for historical reality of a kind of spiritual authority which may appeal to the philosopher, but has no sort of influence with the common people. If in this way Christianity were ever to become a religion for the learned, it would entirely change its character and lose the

greater part of its power. As Professor Shailer Matthews has well said, "It is easy enough to forecast the effects of this sort of presentation of an unhistorical Gospel. If once the world becomes convinced that Jesus has no more reality than His value as a working hypothesis of God's character, and that the Gospels have only a functional worth, the Church as an aggressive spiritual force will go out of commission. The very men who champion such a view will find it difficult to do more than reshape the religious fervour and faith which belong to men who once lived assured of the actual historicity of a risen Christ. The world at large has very little use for a myth or a legend or an illusion, no matter how it may assist it to function religiously. We may need sometimes to speculate as to what would be left the world if evangelical theology were to go into bankruptcy ; but it does not become us to depreciate its assets, much less call for a receiver of a solvent concern."¹ In the old

¹ *The Church and the Changing Order*, p. 61.

fable the strength of Antæus lay in his touch with his mother Earth. When Hercules lifted him into the air he overcame him with ease. So the strength of our Christian faith lies in its touch with historic reality, with what is sometimes called the fact of Christ.

We must insist, therefore, that modern Christian teaching cannot be allowed to separate itself from the evangelic facts. These facts have to be investigated with all the aids which a scientific criticism can supply, and we need not fear the results of the process. The criticism which starts with a bias against the supernatural, whatever else it may be, is not scientific, and has certainly no right to an exclusive possession of the field. But the facts have not only to be examined but interpreted, and a distinction has to be drawn between the interpretation given to them by the men of the first century and the interpretation which is suited to the mind of to-day. But if this interpretation is to be Christian it must still

remain in vital and organic relation with the facts. The exigencies of modern life and thought lay upon the Church as its first duty the necessity for a positive reconstruction of Christian doctrine, or, in other words, for an intellectual presentation of the Gospel in terms intelligible to the men of to-day. This task the Church can only accomplish as it remains loyal to the original deposit of the faith. To invent a philosophical Christianity without any historical background is to preach another gospel. Theology will never go very far wrong so long as it finds its basis in the Bible and in history. Apart from these, it becomes a mere speculative system whose authority is simply that of its authors. It must be remembered that "a theology may be liberal and scientific and not be unevangelical. The history of Christian thought cannot be wholly a history of mistakes. The fact that historical criticism and the acceptance of the methods and results of biological science bring one back with new confidence to the heart of an historic

faith, though by the road of a somewhat radical methodology, is at once reassuring and eloquent as to the future. There are many points, both in conclusions and in method, at which there will always be honest difference of opinion, but whatever is a fact will finally be reached by any legitimate investigation."

To sum up, the Christian religion possesses what a mere philosophical speculation lacks—the historic person of Jesus Christ. It was the force of this personality which originated the Christian Church, and has transformed and inspired men and women all through its history. The history of the Person is not confined to the few years that Jesus spent on earth, but is spread over the ages, and is to be studied in the results it has produced. In estimating it we must believe, as Emerson puts it, "what the years and the centuries say against the hours." Christian doctrine is the prolonged and varied effort of the human mind to explain the Christian facts and to relate them to the

widening processes of thought. Its truth is proved by the extent to which it corresponds to the facts of history and by the life for which these facts supply the motive power.

CHAPTER I
THE CHRIST OF THE SYNOPTIC
GOSPELS

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THE CHRIST OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.—ST. MARK i. 1.

THE Christian religion rests on history. It is rooted and finds its centre in the person of Jesus Christ. When we speak of the person of Jesus Christ we are not merely using a theological expression. We mean the historical personality as it once existed at a certain time and in certain places, and as it is interpreted in the experience of the Christian Church and of Christian people. There are, as we have already seen, not a few modern critics who tell us that this Person, as we know Him, is not really historical. They draw distinctions between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith,

and they urge that these are two different persons, or that they represent two different ideas. They draw distinctions, again, between the actual and the ideal Christ, and they maintain that there is little or no relation between them. The one is lost in the mists of antiquity, the other is the product of the pious imagination of Christians.

Now, in statements like these we have put before us the central problem of the Christian life and of Christian thought at the present time. It is quite true that there are many who insist that we need not be troubled even if it be discovered that Jesus Christ was never an historical Person at all. They say that we may well be content with the ideal Christ; that in Him, and in a certain mental and spiritual relationship to Him, men can find sufficient for faith, for hope, and for life. They say also that it is impossible to express in historical fact eternal ideas, and that it is the eternal ideas contained in the teaching and work

of the Lord Jesus Christ that are important, and that if we have these history does not matter, or does not matter much.

Now, to certain philosophers of the mystic type this may be a possible position, and it cannot be denied that there is a certain importance in this point of view; but for the ordinary man, for those who want to find in their religion something actual and in their Christ something of the real, this position will not suffice. Nay, if it is to be insisted upon, it means the end of Christianity. It is impossible to find in mere ideas, still less in ideas divorced from all reality and actuality, the motive power, the force, the passion, and the sustaining grace that men and women need in this world to lift them out of the slough of sin and out of the pitiful weaknesses of the flesh to those heights of self-denial and aspiration and moral service which every true religion involves and requires.

And so we have to consider, however inadequately, what there is to be said for the historical interpretation of Jesus Christ. We have to ask ourselves, first of all, What is His relation to the history of the time at which He is presumed to have lived? We have to ask as to those who reported concerning Him whether they are credible witnesses, and whether their reports may be received. We have to ask also as to the growth of ideas and beliefs about Him. Why did men and women, on the slender foundation of the history of Jesus in Palestine, build all that mighty superstructure of thought and action that we know as Christianity? and why did they build in certain forms and not in others? If there is to be drawn a line of distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, at what point are these connected, or are they connected at all? If so, how did the one pass into the other, and how are we to distinguish between them? These

are the points that must be frankly and simply inquired into, that we may discover whether there is or is not in the new thought of to-day some light to be shed upon the vital problems which they involve.

And at the outset there are certain cautions to be borne in mind. The subject is one which must be approached as far as possible without preconceptions. There are many recent writers on the life of Jesus Christ who have come to their subject believing that anything in the nature of a miracle or of what is sometimes called the supernatural, is impossible; or, if they do not say as much as this, the feeling that this is so colours their whole treatment of the subject. That is to say, on one fundamental point they are biassed from the outset. This bias must at once be banished from our minds. It is only possible to take a fair view of the facts by keeping on that aspect of the question at least an open mind, by believing that there are more things in heaven and earth than

are dreamt of in our philosophy.¹ Then we must also banish from our minds that other prejudice which would treat the records of the life of Jesus Christ as being absolutely and wholly exceptional, and as having to be taken as verbally inspired and literally true. There again is a barrier to frank and free discussion, and to true thought. We have to approach the whole subject with an absolutely open mind, in reverence and on our knees, as every scientific inquirer approaches any subject of inquiry—in a spirit of humility, as one who knows little, and asks to know more, prepared for whatever the truth may reveal, and prepared to act upon the truth so revealed.

The story of Jesus Christ is contained mainly in three Gospels. These come first in the logical though not in the chronological order of the discussion. These three Gospels are known by the term Synoptic, which means that they give a common synopsis

¹ St. Augustine's cautious statement is worth bearing in mind here: "Miracles are not contrary to nature, but only to what we know of nature."

of the subject under consideration, or in more simple speech a bird's-eye view. These Gospels present certain very strange phenomena. They are alike and yet they are different. One of them resembles one of the other two more than it does the third, and the points in which they are to be distinguished or in which they are alike differ on different occasions. The relation between these three Gospels has been for long years a matter of much discussion and of keen controversy. At the present time it is possible to say that a certain agreement on some main points has been arrived at. It is now fairly generally agreed that of these three Gospels Mark is the earliest, having been written, roughly speaking, or having taken the form in which we know it, between the years A.D. 65 and 70. The writers of the other two Gospels probably had Mark's¹ Gospel before them,

¹ Cf. Wellhausen's *Einleitung*, p. 57: "Mark is known to the two other Synoptic writers in the same form and with the same contents in which we possess it now."

embodied it in their writing, and added to it from other sources known to themselves. Of these sources there is one which was common, just as Mark was, in some measure both to Matthew and to Luke. This source consisted of a number of logia,¹ oracles or sayings of Jesus Christ. Concerning these there is a fairly well authenticated tradition that they were collected by the Apostle Matthew. In addition there are certain other sources drawn upon by Matthew from which were obtained his genealogy and his account of the birth of Jesus Christ. There are other sources also drawn upon by Luke giving his genealogy and his account of the birth of Jesus, and containing also another long narrative which is called the Perean section.² But

¹ Commonly called Q, from the German *Quelle*, source.

² Of this Wernle says (*Quelle des Lebens Jesu*): "It is highly probable that Luke compiled these valuable pieces of information out of a lost Gospel." Some think that this special source was used elsewhere in Luke's Gospel, and that it adds an element of equal historical value to that supplied by Mark.

the net result of this is that of the three Gospels Mark's is the centre and the earliest. The other two embody this, alter it a little in places, and upon this prior work build up their narratives, with the addition of certain other material to which they had access.

We must now examine these writers individually. The Gospel of Mark is an historical document of the first importance. It is a clear, vivid, artless narrative written with no other purpose than to set forth certain facts concerning Jesus Christ, to proclaim His Gospel, and to declare Him to be the Son of God. The story may be taken fairly to represent the ideas of the early Church concerning Jesus, and there is probably some truth in the tradition that the writer derived his material largely from the preaching of the Apostle Peter. His writing fits in with the known history of the time, and bears upon it certain watermarks of truth. Side by side with other documents of the age it stands out conspicuous for its sobriety, sanity and its marked authenticity.

In this Gospel we are often nearer the actual scenes of the life of Jesus than in any other, and the interpretations of Jesus and His work which are given in it are among the earliest that we know.

The Gospel of St. Matthew is a different story. This Gospel was written especially for Jews and Jewish Christians. Its chief aim was to prove to them that Jesus was the Messiah, and it is undoubtedly coloured by that intention. Naturally, therefore, it gives greater prominence to the teaching of Jesus, and it is particularly valuable from the special way in which that teaching is treated. To the writer of this Gospel Jesus is the Messiah, and His work is interpreted as the consummation of God's revelation to and through Israel. In His teaching Jesus gives the new law of God which is to fulfil, and to that extent to supersede, the old. The fact that He does this indicates the exalted position which He occupies in the mind and faith of the evangelist.

St. Luke stands, again, by himself. One of the more recent results which modern New Testament investigation (especially in the recent work of Harnack) has produced has been the impression as to the reliability of St. Luke as an historian. He was careful and accurate. He tried to write in order, and to sift his materials. He used at least two earlier written records, Mark and another (seen most clearly in chaps. ix. 51—xviii. 14), the latter of which selected incidents dealing especially with the poor and outcast: and this helps to give its peculiar emphasis and colour to Luke's own work. His Gospel is one of glad tidings for the poor, but it is the Gospel of a Saviour, of One who has the power to help men and to deliver them from their sins. To St. Luke, as to the other Synoptic writers Jesus is the Son of God manifested in grace and power.

Now, what have we here as regards the history? It is both necessary and possible to go behind all these three Gospels. There is something behind both the logia of

Matthew and the narrative of Mark. These both spring from the life and thought of the early Church. But behind them we find, besides the sources which we have mentioned, such writings as the speeches of St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of St. Paul. These are among the earliest of our evidences in regard to Jesus Christ, and they are evidences which, as modern research has shown, cannot be reasonably set aside. In the thirty or forty years that elapsed between the death of Jesus on the cross and the writing of the first of our Gospels there is to be found a body of tradition growing up amongst men and women who knew Jesus Christ, who had seen Him and heard Him preach. This body of tradition¹ remained steadfast and

¹ Cf. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and its Transmission*: "When Q. (*i.e.* the Logia) and Mark appear to report the same saying, we have the nearest approach that we can hope to get to the common tradition of the earliest Christian society about our Lord's words." Perhaps we may say the same of *independent* agreement between Mark and the source of Luke.

immovable, centring round the Person of Jesus Christ as its great focal point. In the hands of the Evangelists the story of this Person took the form it did because each of them gave his testimony with a single eye to the truth, as it had found him, and therefore as he believed it would find others. It may be said that they wrote with a purpose, but their purpose was not such as to destroy their veracity as witnesses.

If, then, we go back beyond these Gospels, and sift the story they contain as it ought to be sifted, what is the residuum that we find concerning Jesus Christ? The question is an important one, because it is too generally assumed by some of the more advanced critics of the New Testament that if we could go far enough back and reconstruct the earliest picture of Jesus Christ, we should find that He was simply a man like other men—a great man, no doubt, a religious genius, but no more. We should find also, it is said, that the account we have of Him

is but the result of the growth of popular tradition and legend, and that the person discoverable behind it all was but a great Jewish Rabbi. It is not that the historicity of Jesus is denied. Such a person may be assumed to have existed. But if the truth were known He would be found to be a very different person from the one that is set before us in the Gospels.

It may safely be said, however, that this conclusion is not borne out by the facts. The first point to be considered is that these writers are all concerned to write a Gospel. They are not writing a biography of Jesus—they do not attempt to do anything of the kind. They wrote what they called the Gospel of Jesus Christ—that is, the good news of Jesus Christ, and the good news is not something that Jesus Christ said about God, or some message that He delivered to men. The good news is, in the first instance, Jesus Christ Himself, His life, His person, His action, and His

teaching.¹ That is the centre of the whole story, and the concern of the Evangelists was to set forth Jesus Christ in His aspect of good news to men, because they themselves had come to believe that in this Person there was one that had to do with every child of man, and that He not only spake things which men would want to hear, but did things in the benefits of which men would want to share. But what of the Person that is thus delineated? We, in these days, stand at a special disadvantage because every word in these Gospels is so familiar to us that we can hardly help reading them without a kind of bias or assumption that spoils their real effect. It would be good for us sometimes if we could take a point of view sufficiently detached as to be able to read the Gospel of St. Mark with an absolutely open mind.

¹ Cf. Harnack: "Jesus belongs to His Gospel not as a part of it, but as its embodiment. He is its personal realisation and its power. And such He will always be felt to be."

The attempt is worth making in order that we may discover for ourselves the point of view of the Gospel writers, and the kind of impression which the story of Jesus first made upon them. In this story we have One depicted in simple, easy language, with a kind of unconscious but consummate art, who at once produces an impression which is different from that of any other character in history.

The character of Jesus Christ as it is drawn in these Gospels is so complete, so lofty, so strangely perfect, that it is hard indeed to believe that any average men could have invented it. He is meek, and yet He makes the loftiest pretensions. He claims to stand in unique relations to man, on the one hand, and to God upon the other. He speaks concerning God and man in tones that are everywhere recognisable, not only by His contemporaries but by us, as tones of authority. He claims the power to forgive men's sins, and to stand between them and God. He tells us things

about ourselves, about the innermost working of our hearts and minds, that we have in our best moments to confess to be wonderfully true to life. He deals with His own life in such a fashion as to make men realise that He is in the world for a purpose, and that the fulfilment of that purpose is His chief business here. Also He is depicted as ere long setting His face steadfastly towards the tragedy which is to come at the end; and He meets it not in the bold spirit of a martyr, but with a certain shrinking and agony and fear that make us understand that there was something here that cannot quite be explained in terms of a martyr's death. He gives the impression of One who, though He was truly human, was yet perfect as no man we have ever known or read of has been perfect. What is called the sinlessness of Jesus Christ is not a dogma. It is a fact. The picture drawn of Him in the Gospels is consistently that of One who rose superior to the common failings

of our humanity. The picture has reality behind it. The character set forth is not of that ideal purity which might be regarded as the product of imagination. It gives an impression of strength as well as of sweetness and light. The Jesus of the Gospels is indeed one who was tempted like as we are, yet without sin. His sinlessness was an achievement, the result of struggle, the triumph of the divine over the human, and of the spiritual over the earthly.

Turn now from the character to the teaching of Jesus Christ as it is set forth in the Gospel of Mark and in the logia of Matthew alone. Here we have not doctrine, not a systematic theology, but a number of detached sayings concerning God and man and life that certainly form a most remarkable collection. To say that Jesus was a religious genius is to say less than the truth. There is a directness, a reality, and a force about His words that set them in a category by

themselves. He spake out of His own inner consciousness and experience ; and though some corresponding experience is needed to enable us to understand His words, the first judgment passed on them remains good, that "never man spake like this man."

But there is more to be said even than this. The Gospel of Mark is saturated with miracle, and the fact must be frankly faced. It is no longer possible to argue that miracles prove that Jesus Christ was divine. In modern times the position with regard to miracles is altogether different. We regard them as attested by Jesus Christ rather than as an attestation of Him. There is very little use in discussing or trying to account for the miracles apart from the Person of Jesus Himself. It is the Person that adds value to the miracles, and not the miracles to the Person. If these events were recorded of any ordinary person in history, the difficulty of accepting them would be very great. It is because

they are recorded of the Person we read of here, and it is because there is something about Him so great, something so transcendent, that it becomes at least not unreasonable to believe that He would do things other people did not and could not do. Our knowledge from other sources of the power of the Person of Jesus must be added to the historical evidence for His mighty works.

The Gospel of Mark ends with the miracle of the Resurrection, told in a much shorter form than we find elsewhere. Upon this story the belief of the early Church in Jesus was very largely based. It is sometimes assumed, however, that the belief in the Resurrection was the creation of the thought of the early Church concerning Jesus Christ; but when that assumption is made the question remains, What created the Church? We shall return to this point later. Meanwhile we may simply ask—If Jesus Christ never really rose, if it were all a dream or a mistake on the part of the disciples,

why did they remain disciples? Why did they make themselves into a Church, and why did that Church act as it did?¹ It is difficult to avoid the belief that at the grave in the Garden something happened—what and how it is hardly for us to say—and that that something was a sufficient cause of all that afterwards took place. That is the order which investigation has to take. It is necessary to realise that here in Jesus Christ, in the understanding of Him which the disciples reached, in the thought to which they were driven concerning Him, in the actions which He Himself accomplished, there was that which made these men and made the Church. And the power which they felt and to which they witnessed remains until the present day. The greatest miracle about the beginning of Christianity in some respects

¹ The disciples do not give the impression of men who were acting under a delusion, nor does the history of the early Church suggest that men were mistaken in looking to Jesus as a living and present power.

is the miracle of these Gospel stories of Jesus Christ. Many years and much labour have been spent in the study of them, and the subject is by no means exhausted. Yet we may surely say that to imagine that these first three Gospels could have come together like a fortuitous concourse of atoms is altogether impossible. The Synoptic portrait of Jesus is not a mosaic made up of legend, of mistaken reminiscence, of Jewish lore, of Rabbinical teaching, and of Greek philosophy. It is hardly too much to say that the men who wrote these books were not capable of any such literary feat as this. They were in touch with reality all the way through. Behind their writings is the great figure of the Christ, and it was His transcendent greatness which gave them their impulse and made them write as they did. True, they did not altogether understand Him, and could seldom rise to the heights He occupied. The forms and language in which they wrote are altogether their own, but all the better on this account

do they reveal the substance behind them.

The fact remains, therefore, that in these three different accounts, growing up as they did, and written by different hands, we have a clear, fairly authentic, and uniform picture of Jesus Christ.¹ We have not here, as it were, a number of rapid impressionist sketches which present different types of personality. The story is one, and the unity of it is the most remarkable thing about it, and the question arises whence that unity came. It may be said that all these men were geniuses. That would make the thing far more difficult, because each genius would differ from the other, and each would present the subject under investigation under a guise so different from that of the others

¹ Speaking of the sources of the Gospels Dr. Salmond says: "The more I study the Gospels the more convinced I am that we have in them contemporaneous history—*i.e.* that we have in them the stories told of Jesus immediately after His death, and which had been circulated and, as I am disposed to believe, put in writing while He was yet alive."

that it would be almost unrecognisable as the same. There are in existence at least three different biographies of the poet Milton, by three skilled literary men, all dealing with practically the same materials, and again and again in different parts of their books it is almost impossible to believe they are writing about the same man. The inference is that none of them really knew him, and that they all write more or less from imagination. But in the case of our Evangelists there arises the irresistible impression that there is some Person behind their accounts of whom they knew, as it were, at first hand. They all understand and misunderstand Him in the same way, but they are trying every one of them honestly and faithfully to give a picture of what He said, did, and was, and in that they have wonderfully succeeded.

The explanation of this is not very far to seek. One of the pitiful things about a discussion of this subject is the way in which men prefer to make difficulties for

themselves, and go round by the longest route. After all the Columbus' egg solution is often the soundest; and the right solution of what is known as the Synoptic problem, on the historical side of it, is the simplest and easiest. It is just this, that behind all these writers there is a Person whom these men knew, through the personal witness, in some degree at least, of those who had seen and heard Him and on whom He had produced an indelible impression, and that it is this impression which they have handed on to us to-day.

Now, if this is so, or if it is any approach to the truth, what is the consequence to the Christian Church? To be quite frank, we may say that it is altogether useless to discuss questions like these *in vacuo*. They are far too important. The Church has no need for mere scholastic disquisitions concerning them. That is simply to deal with the dry bones. Whether they accept the fact or not, Christian people are deeply concerned with the question whether they

can in any sense go back to the days of Jesus Christ and believe that He was, and that He was what some of these earliest disciples believed Him to be; whether they can regard Him as in a true sense a man, and yet so great, so strange, so inexplicable by all human standards that He was also something more—God manifest in the flesh. It is a matter of supreme concern to the Christian Church to discover whether this is so or not. And the fact may be verified by every man for himself, not only by the process of historical inquiry, but also by the process of a personal experience. If Christ was what these early disciples believed Him to be, then He will remain the same for all men. The avenue of faith still remains open, and every man may walk in it for himself. To trust Christ and to obey Him, to take Him at His word and to accept His will, is still possible to us, and produces still the same effects as in the days of old. The suggestion of Coleridge that no man has a right to judge Christianity

till he has tried it for himself has about it a certain truth and reasonableness. "If any man willeth to do God's will he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God." Thus Jesus Himself called for the childlike candour of a personal quest. To those who approach Him in such a spirit His true greatness dawns upon the soul, the ancient historic picture obtains a new life and warmth, its vague outlines are filled in, and the heart is moved to the confession, "My Lord and my God."

CHAPTER II
THE CHRIST OF ST. PAUL

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THE CHRIST OF ST. PAUL

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle.

ROM. i. 1.

A MODERN writer has said that it is to-day with St. Paul as St. Paul himself said that it was with Moses, viz. that a veil is over the hearts of the people when his words are read. And certainly with many Christians that is only too true. To them this great apostle is but a name for a number of difficult themes, for a number of letters hard to be understood, and for a number of unintelligible texts. By the great majority of Christian people the Apostle Paul has almost ceased to be regarded as a real and living man. They speak of him as the second founder of Christianity. They have a secret suspicion

that he spoiled what they call the pure and simple doctrine of Jesus Christ. They believe that it was he who was responsible for turning Christianity from a very simple ethical system into a system of dogma. They say that to St. Paul may be traced nearly all the intellectual and ecclesiastical troubles of Christendom, and therefore they are too ready to set him upon one side as a teacher and leader who may easily be dispensed with. And they are making a great mistake. One of the benefits that is likely to come from a closer investigation and clearer understanding of the New Testament Scriptures is a better understanding and appreciation of this great apostle. He has been no doubt admired, revered, almost worshipped in the past; he has been responsible for great revivals of Christian truth and teaching; but in it all he himself has remained somewhat obscure. He has given to men and women the key to the understanding of the spirit of Christ, but over his own spirit there has been drawn a

veil, and it is well for us sometimes to try to get behind his terminology and teaching, and to discover there an intense, passionate, and holy man—one of the few great figures in the world's history, and one from whom even to-day much may be learned of the things of God and of the secret of Christ.

Now, our concern at present is not with St. Paul and his teaching as a whole, but with St. Paul's presentation and understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ. This man is our earliest and most important witness for Jesus Christ. He became a Christian only, at the outside, some four or five years after the crucifixion of Jesus. His letters are the earliest Christian documents extant, and the more important of them are to be dated within twenty-five years of the death of Jesus.¹ They take us back to that time when Christian teaching

¹ Harnack puts the conversion of St. Paul in the year A.D. 30 and the writing of the Thessalonian Epistles in the year 48-49. Ramsay says 51-52.

was being first formulated, and when the Christian Church was being first built up. They are in no sense studied historical presentations of Jesus Christ ; they are rather fugitive pieces that have come white-hot out of the heart of the writer and are addressed to certain special needs and circumstances in the Christian Church. There is nothing artificial about them. There is nothing of the skilled presentation of a case. They take for granted many of the things we would like to know, and they deal with subjects which to the writer were intensely real. It is necessary to take some pains in trying to understand them ; and they are to be understood, not by being treated as repositories of proof texts, but by being read as we would read any other books, and read with the background of the time and circumstances in which they were written always before our minds. When this is done it is possible to discover what wonderful letters these are. They burn with passion and throb with life ; there is felt through them

the beating of a great heart ; they are direct, forceful, and convincing ; they witness in every line of them to the hold which the writer had on Jesus Christ, and to the hold which Jesus Christ had on him.

These letters show us that to St. Paul the Lord Jesus Christ was in the first instance the Man of Galilee. There are some scholars who tell us that they can discover in the writings of the Apostle Paul that he had no sort of interest in the historical Jesus. They say he is dealing with the Christ of Idea and Ideal all the while ; that, as St. Paul presents Him, Christ is a kind of phantasmal being, the product of his own heated imagination, and very far removed from the Jesus of history. The answer to this allegation may be discovered by every reader for himself. It is only necessary to read these letters as has just been suggested, candidly, and with some exercise of the historical imagination, and it is possible to discover that present to the mind of the writer is the Jesus of history, who lived at a

certain period amongst men, who was born of a woman, made under the law, who taught and spoke as never man spoke, who left with His disciples a conviction of His sinlessness and of the absolute holiness of His character, who was crucified, who died that man might live, who rose from the dead, and of whose resurrection there were witnesses then living. St. Paul has no need to prove these points. He has no need to dwell upon the details of the life of Jesus. He has no need even to dwell upon the details of the teaching of Jesus. He was writing for people whose minds had long been familiar with these things, and who did not need that he should repeat them on every occasion. This was his Gospel, the message he was urging and pressing upon the world. What he had to do was to take this story of Jesus Christ as it had been manifested to him, and to tell it to others in such a way as that out of the tale they could come to understand that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour

of man, God, blessed for ever, and that of this great fact he, Paul, was a witness.¹

But what about the witness himself? Is the man to be trusted and is his testimony sound? Again, there are some scholars who tell us that we cannot place very much reliance on the testimony of a man of his kind. They say he was altogether too imaginative a person. They even accuse him of being neurotic—to use a modern term. He was accustomed to have visions or trances of an epileptic kind; and for that reason it is assumed that we cannot trust him any more than we can trust any poor creature of the sort whom we know in everyday life. These things are said to rest on the man's own testimony. He had visions and revelations of the

¹ Dr. Denney, however, is right when he says: "There was always one immense qualification of this 'purely historical' view. Paul never thought of Christ, and could not think of Him, except as risen and exalted. Christianity may exist without any speculative Christology, but it never has existed, and never can exist, without faith in a living Saviour."—*Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 30.

Lord; and when a certain revelation came to him he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body. It is not always easy to believe one in whose life imagination evidently played so large a part. But this is only one side of the picture. The other comes also from the man's own testimony. He tells us that he was educated in Jerusalem, that he was a Jew of the Jews, even a Pharisee of the Pharisees, though he had a somewhat wider outlook than most of the people of his time, because he had a double kind of education, which enabled him to see beyond the borders of Judaism. He was a man of his time, and he had all the limitations of his time. The earth was to him the centre of the universe, covered over with a brazen canopy of heaven, in which the stars were hung like lamps. His world was the Roman Empire, and beyond its confines he hardly looked. He was expecting the coming of the Messiah; he was charged throughout

with strange, Jewish notions concerning God and the kingdom of God, and of the coming of God's Servant. But within this framework of contemporary thought and religion we can read something else, and can discover the kind of man that this was. He was a sane, strong, shrewd, and keenly intellectual man. He was one of those men between the lines of whose speech we may read, and see the transparency of his nature, the eagerness and passion of his soul, and the limpidity of his thought, even though his words be so often difficult and confused. He was a man who had learned to live, and knew what life was. No one can read that great pæan of his on Love in 1 Corinthians xiii. without knowing the kind of heart that was in him. He was a man ready to give himself up for the thing he accounted dear—a patriot of the patriots, who could count himself anathema for his brethren's sake. He poured out all the wealth of his talent and devotion at the feet of Jesus

Christ. The impression he produces even to-day is that he was one of the great, strong souls of history, no mere fanatic, but a sane and trustworthy man. Take one single instance out of the record of his life as it is written in the Acts of the Apostles. In the vivid account there given of the shipwreck on the crowded transport, we are told that when the very sailors themselves had yielded to panic there was one man who kept his head and saved the situation, and that man was this saint and visionary Paul.

Now, what was the relation of this man to Jesus Christ? He had been at first a persecutor of Christianity. He was a Jew; and to him the mere thought of a crucified Messiah was blasphemy. It was a degradation to his holy religion, and being, as he was, a man very earnest about religious things, he thought, as any man of his time and place would have thought, that he was doing God service in harrying and persecuting these Christians to the utmost. The

history of religion supplies abundant evidence that it is often accounted the most right and glorious thing to smite the enemies of God and show them no mercy: and that was St. Paul's view.

It was when he was engaged on this work—a work necessary, it may be, but hardly congenial, journeying from Jerusalem to Damascus concerning this persecution of the Christians—that suddenly there came a great light from heaven, and he heard a voice saying: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Trembling and amazed, he asked, “Who art Thou, Lord?” And the answer came, “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.” About this story, and the experience it involved, a whole literature has grown up. It is hardly necessary to try to explain it: we may be quite content to abide by the consequences of it for St. Paul and for Christendom. We cannot say even whether the vision was subjective or objective. None of the explanations given make the

slightest difference to the fact that from that time forward Paul was a changed man. He sank to the earth bewildered and stunned. He came to himself, groping like a blind man; and for some three years he dwelt apart, pondering on the vision, and seeking to relate it to his thought and life. It had come to him like a bolt from the blue, a voice from the very presence of God. And the meaning of it, as he came in time clearly to see, was an unmistakable conviction that in this Jesus whom he was persecuting, whom he hated with a bitter hate, there was the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.¹

Now, St. Paul was a man who did not do things by halves, and when he discovered this he shaped his life accordingly. From that very moment he was Christ's man, he bore branded upon his body the marks of

¹ It is more than probable that in coming to this conclusion St. Paul was influenced by the Messianic and eschatological ideas in which his mind was steeped; but this does not destroy the significance of his discovery of the Christ in Jesus.

Christ Jesus. He was the bond-servant of Christ; to him to live was Christ, and he was given up utterly and absolutely to this new Leader and Master of his soul. It was then only a very little time since Jesus Christ had been upon the earth. Paul consorted with some of the men who had known Him, he talked with them, and sat at their feet. He gathered from them His Gospel, and came to understand from what they said something of the teaching and message of Jesus Christ. He was able to formulate in his own mind the kind of thing that the life of Jesus Christ meant for himself and for the world. He came forth from his days of retirement a man charged and possessed by Jesus Christ, and he went out into the world as the apostle of Christ, to preach His Gospel to all men.

What did this Gospel of Paul mean? All his teaching concerning Jesus Christ must be interpreted by his personal experience of Jesus Christ. First of all, he taught men that this Jesus was the Son of God. A

close study of St. Paul's letters concerning Jesus Christ leads to the conclusion that whilst he holds, or seems to hold, that the Lord Jesus Christ was in some way inferior and subordinate to God the Father, he yet very frequently puts Him, as it were, side by side with God, and reads God in terms of His revelation. To him God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To him Jesus Christ has the religious value of God; to him Jesus Christ is the centre, sum, and beginning of the Christian religion. It is in Christ that men find God, it is through Him that they discover God's truth, and it is by their relation to Him that they enter into communion with God Himself. And there is no mere artificial theorising about this. It is not that the Apostle is seeking in some way to prove to himself and his fellow-men that there is something in Jesus Christ different from other men. He finds the fact of Jesus Christ borne into his consciousness, and he cannot evade it. His theology is not an attempt to prove a thesis, so much as to

account for a body of facts. Given certain experiences, his problem is how to relate them to what he knows of God, of himself, and of the world. But for us the problem takes a different form. We have to ask how did it become possible and agreeable for a man like this apostle, who had not known Jesus in the flesh, to go about and preach Him, and in the strength of his preaching to suffer and to persuade others to suffer in His name? The only answer to the question is to be found in the fact that to St. Paul Jesus was the Christ, the everlasting Son of the Father, the Lord and Master of men, who has the right to demand and receive the homage of every human soul. It is not altogether easy to indicate the ground and reason for this in the Apostle's consciousness. It may be that we must find it in the evidence he had received from the other apostles as to the sinless and beautiful life of Jesus Christ, or in the experience which he had himself obtained concerning Jesus Christ in the

meditation of his own heart. But whether we find it here or there matters little for the result, which is that to this apostle Jesus Christ was the equivalent of God, and that he found in Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, the way to God, the way to life and peace.

But once more, to St. Paul Jesus was not only the Son of God, He was the Saviour of the world. His saving work centred in, and was made possible by, His cross. To St. Paul the cross of Jesus Christ is the great central pillar of his faith; and he is determined that he will know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and that he will glory in nothing save in the cross of Jesus Christ, by whom the world was crucified unto him, and he unto the world. In his attempts to describe the meaning of the death of Jesus on the cross St. Paul almost exhausts the possibilities of human speech. It is a sacrifice, a propitiation, a means of reconciliation, an atonement. In every possible way, and by every possible kind of illustration, he tries to bring home

to the hearts of men this thought, that in Jesus Christ's death, in the love that that death involved and manifested, there is a ground and reason for man's hope and peace, for his forgiveness, his justification, his salvation, his sanctification.

Now, here we must go direct to the heart of the Apostle's own experience. It is quite impossible to understand St. Paul's view of the atoning death of Jesus Christ by examining it, as it were, *in vacuo*. It must be regarded always in the light of his experience. Apart from this no intelligible or satisfactory explanation either of the fact or of the doctrine based upon it is possible. Doctrine is in this case but the explication of experience: it puts into words the influence that the fact of the death of Christ had in the man's own life, and the way in which it was manifested in his own experience. Let us return to that experience for a moment. It must be remembered that St. Paul was a consistent Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, by his own con-

fession. He was devoted to the Law, he believed in the Law of God, and he believed that the one thing man had to do in this world was to keep that law. For himself, he had tried to keep that law from his youth up, and he had tried harder than most men of his day. He had made it his business; he had struggled to do his duty.

Possibly one reason why men find it so hard to enter into his point of view is that they have never struggled as he did. To many men religion in these days is a dainty, easy, comfortable thing: they have never really thought, wrestled, and prayed. Luther could understand St. Paul, because he had had an experience similar to his. To him religion was a great and serious reality. He too had known the bondage of the law, and had struggled desperately to free himself from it. So St. Paul when he went on the road to Damascus was utterly miserable, ashamed, and beaten. He could not keep the law. Try as he would, he had failed. He had sinned miserably, and

he saw before him a long vista of days in which he was to strive helplessly and hopelessly to do God's will, but without success. And then there came the revelation. It meant for him that what he could not do for himself God through Christ Jesus had done for him, for all men, and for all time ; and that what he had to do now was not to seek to do the will of God, and spend himself in vain in the struggle, but rather to accept the gift of forgiveness at God's hands as a gracious act upon His part and as won for him by the work of Jesus Christ. And it was that thought which brought peace to this restless soul. It was the conviction that God's forgiveness did not depend upon what a man did, but upon the sheer pity of God, and that it was to be obtained, not by any action of ours, but by a simple trust in God's willingness to give. It was this conviction that broke the man down in penitence and trust, and lifted him up again on his feet a new man in Jesus Christ, who had died for his sake. This experience is obvi-

ously one that cannot be understood by any mere intellectual interpretation of it, but by an experience that arises out of the same habit of thought and points to the same ends. To enter into St. Paul's mind we must stand where he stood. Those who understand what sin is, who have felt the alienation that comes by it, the gulf between the soul and God, the stain of guilt, will be glad enough to take the way of escape that is offered in Jesus Christ, and to find in His manifested love their peace and their salvation.

And thus, once more, to St. Paul Jesus Christ was not only Son of God and Saviour of the world, but He was Lord of life. In the writings of this apostle the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His present life and power resulting from it, play a very large part. To him the resurrection was vital. It meant everything. It meant all the difference between a dead and a living Christ. It meant all the difference between hope and despair. "If in this life only we have

hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." To St. Paul Jesus Christ was not a sacred and beautiful memory, He was a living power; and in Him the Apostle himself lived. Again, we must judge of the reality of his religion, and of the intelligibility of what he says, not simply by the outward statement, but by the man's experience, by the effect of those statements in his life. His life in Christ was a positive and real thing. To him to live was Christ, and His mystical union with Christ had a real ethical value. He was trying constantly to do the will of Christ; he was preaching every hour the Gospel of Christ. He saw something of the saving power of Jesus Christ in his own life, and knew what Christ meant to him. He realised that he was lifted out of the gloomy dungeon of the law into the glorious liberty of a child of God. He knew that for him the change was as real as it was inexpressible. It meant life to him, a new life, a larger and fuller life than he had known before; and

because he knew that, he was able to tell men and women of the Christ who had brought this to him, and in whom he found it realised. He did not look back to a dead Christ; he looked up and around him as to one who was alive for evermore, and who was his elder brother and his daily companion and friend. He found in this Christ the Head of the Christian Church, of the whole Christian community; and he bade men and women everywhere to look up to Him as to their Lord and Master, their Saviour and their King, and, by their relation to Him, find life and peace.

But the question naturally arises, What sort of connection is there between this Christ and the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels? The question is a pertinent one, but the answer to it is not far to seek.

It is in the Synoptic Gospels that we find the seed, the beginning, the foundation of all that St. Paul teaches. He was not building upon air. The basis of his doctrine was not a dream. It was because Jesus

had been, and had lived and died and risen again, that he was able to tell people, in that wonderful and inimitable speech of his, what this Christ was to him, and what He might be to all mankind. If we are to follow out the teaching and thought of this apostle, we must first follow his experience, and call psychology as well as history to our aid. The one thing about which there can be no doubt is the place which Paul gave to Jesus Christ in his own thought and life. To this apostle Jesus was the centre of the universe, and determined a man's relations both to God and to his fellow-men. As Dr. Denney says:¹ "There is not in the history of the human mind an instance of intellectual boldness to compare with this; and it is the supreme daring of it which convinces us that it is the native birth of Paul's Christian faith." This estimate of Jesus Christ can fairly be tested only by those who share the experience out of which it arose. "To every simple Christian," says a modern

¹ *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 42.

German writer¹ “among whom we theologians ought also to be numbered, there lies open the practical way by which we may be led through Paul, Cephas, or John, through Luther and Zwingli, through witnesses of ancient and modern days, through parents, teachers, and friends, through husband and wife, to the joyous love and faith, and to the unquenchable light of the noble and enthralling personality of Jesus, whence such joyous love and faith ever derive fresh sustenance. And whosoever abideth in this love abideth in God, and God in him.”

¹ Dr. Arnold Meyer in *Jesus and Paul*.

CHAPTER III
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These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name.—ST. JOHN XX. 31.

IF it is true, as it is sometimes said, that the Gospel of Luke is the most beautiful book in the world, it is certainly true that the Gospel of John is the most precious. In approaching it we approach holy ground, and we may well take the shoes from off our feet. There are probably very few Christians who have not at some time or other in their experience turned to this Gospel and found in its wonderful words the words of life, of hope, of comfort, and of peace. To most religious people this Gospel has proved a veritable word of God, especially at those times in their lives when all most need

help and guidance. In this connection we think of the story of Nicodemus, of the Woman of Samaria, and of the picture of Him who is the Light of the World, and the Good Shepherd, and the Bread of Life; of the parable of the Vine and the Branches; of the fourteenth chapter—"Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in Me"; and of that strange and inimitable narrative at the end, when the risen Lord comes to His disciples and says, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" In all these passages, almost in every verse of them, there are ideas that have been hallowed to us by long association, and there are words that come to us with ever-fresh meaning and with ever-new grace. And yet this Gospel presents to us one of the strangest and most difficult problems of the New Testament. It is a problem which is probably insoluble; but the insolubility of it does not for a single moment mar or destroy the spiritual and religious value of the book. This should be remembered in

all that may be said about it in the way of criticism. The inspiration, the force, and the value for life and experience of these Scriptures of ours do not depend much upon any of the questions of authorship,¹ date, or authenticity, of which so much is made.

We must admit, then, at the outset that the book presents to us a problem, and one that has not yet yielded its secret. There is in the New Testament a cluster of writings which are called Johannine, consisting of the Fourth Gospel, those Epistles which are known by the name John, and the Apocalypse. The fact that these writings are all attached to the same name and yet differ widely from each other constitutes the problem. We are not concerned here with the relation of the Gospel to the other books

¹ There is something to be said for Prof. Burkitt's view that the Fourth Gospel is a work of philosophy and of philosophical history, and that therefore it is less important to be sure of its authorship than if it were a strictly historical document. Cf. *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, p. 255.

bearing the same name. We have to confine ourselves to the Gospel, and to state the problem it presents, especially in relation to our appreciation of the Person of Jesus Christ.

The problem may be stated roughly in this way. We have on the one hand the Synoptic Gospels, of which we have already spoken, and which give a certain view of the life and Person of Jesus Christ. We have also alongside them this Fourth Gospel, purporting to cover much the same ground, and to deal with the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus, and yet doing so in a way that is absolutely different from these other Gospels. We need have nothing to do in these days with the familiar effort on which so many Christian commentators have spent themselves to harmonise the various Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. There is no possibility of harmonising them if we are to take a really historical and philosophical view of the phenomena which these Gospels present. We have to recognise the

existence of grave, serious, and perhaps insurmountable inconsistencies, and the more frankly we recognise them the better it will be.

The main differences between John and the Synoptic Gospels may be described as follows. In the Synoptic Gospels there is a certain grouping of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the scene of it being mainly Galilee; in St. John there is a different grouping, and the record of different incidents, the scene of nearly all of them being Jerusalem. In the Synoptic Gospels the teaching of Jesus Christ is given in certain very simple and popular forms; in St. John's Gospel the teaching of Jesus Christ is given in a much more elaborate form, and in a form which is cast in a more or less philosophical guise. The style of the Synoptic writers has a certain simplicity and directness; the writer of the Fourth Gospel has a style which is much more artificial and involved. In the Synoptic Gospels it is possible generally to distinguish between

the sayings of Jesus Christ Himself and the writing of the authors of the Gospels ; in St. John's Gospel, our Lord, the writer of the Gospel, John the Baptist, and even the Jews, all speak in the same tongue, and all use the same kind of language.' There is no narrative of the Temptation in the Fourth Gospel, and the presentation of the miracles is different from that of the Synoptic writers. In the former these are signs, and manifest the glory of Jesus ; in the latter they are the outcome of His compassion for men. In St. John's Gospel there is found a set of incidents of which we hear very little in the Synoptic presentation of Jesus Christ. Generally speaking, the Gospel gives a different view of Jesus from that of the Synoptic writers ; there is added to it, towards the end, that whole narrative which centres around the incident of the Raising of Lazarus, and is of immense importance from the standpoint of the Johannine writer, but which in the Synoptic Gospels finds no mention, and for which, indeed, there seems to be no place.

There is at least one serious discrepancy ¹ in regard to the time of the Lord's Supper, and there are others of less importance. We have here, in other words, a writing which professes to give a picture of Jesus Christ, side by side with those other pictures that we have seen, yet which differs from them profoundly in certain fundamental points.

Now, it will no doubt be generally agreed that it is perfectly possible for different writers to present a different account of the same person, or of the same events, and yet for them all to be fundamentally of one mind. But whilst there is a certain fundamental agreement between St. John and the Synoptic writers, we must not lay too much stress upon it. We must rather seek the ground of the difference. And when we come to do so we find that it is very real, and

¹ With regard to this Prof. Burkitt remarks, *loc. cit.* : "This is something more than mere historical inaccuracy. It is a deliberate sacrifice of historical truth : and as the Evangelist is a serious person in deadly earnest, we must conclude that he cared less for historical truth than for something else."

that it accounts very largely for all the phenomena which have been described. This ground of difference is to be found in the words which stand at the head of this chapter: "These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name."

The Fourth Gospel is not a history of Jesus Christ; it is not an attempt to write the Life of Jesus Christ. The Fourth Gospel is rather a theology of Jesus Christ; it is an apologetic, and is written with an apologetic purpose. Its aim is that men may believe that this Jesus is the Christ, and that aim dominates the writer throughout. It guides him in the selection of his incidents, and it gives him the interpretation of his incidents; it justifies him in taking the stories he has of Jesus Christ and translating them into his own language and using them for his own ends. The thing is perfectly legitimate. There is no attempt to deceive. The writer has simply gone back upon the things he

has known and heard, and has tried to set them forth so as to persuade the people of his day that this Jesus of whom he is speaking, whose teaching is being handed about from mouth to mouth, is in very deed the Son of God, and that they may believe in Him and have life in His name. In doing this he is not allegorising, but drawing conclusions from certain facts in his possession.

Who, then, was this writer, and for whom did he write? Probably most Christians still believe that the writer was John, the beloved disciple, and yet we cannot honestly face the problem without admitting that it is exceedingly difficult on merely historical and critical grounds to establish the fact that this Gospel was written by the Apostle John. It cannot have been written much before the end of the first century, and was probably written a little later. If John the Apostle wrote it, he was then in extreme old age, and to some extent at any rate the Gospel hardly bears the signs of a book written by a very old man. Scholars have

therefore cast about to try to find who was the author. Many of them to-day believe that the Gospel was written not by the Apostle John, but by a certain John the Presbyter, who was a well-known figure in the Church of Ephesus about the end of the first century. Others believe that the Gospel was written by some disciple of the Apostle, and that we have here a deposit of the Apostle's teaching worked up by one of his followers.

The truth probably lies somewhere between these various theories. Unquestionably there are things in this Gospel which come directly from a man intimately acquainted with the life of Jesus Christ, and with the situation in Jerusalem at the time when He was alive. There is a deposit, a substratum of first-hand knowledge, which is as good as anything we have in the Synoptic Gospels,¹ and helps us to add to

¹ Cf. Von Soden: "The Gospel of John affords expressions which must have actually come from Jesus, and a still larger number which are so entirely formed out of the Spirit of Jesus that they might well have originated with Him."

the information they give. Then we have to bear in mind that this Gospel was written by a man who was capable of understanding Jesus. We have here—and the fact remains good whatever historical arguments may be brought to bear upon the point—a searching into the heart of Jesus Christ, a grasp of the meaning of the Incarnation and of the whole purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, of which we have very little suggestion in the Synoptic writers. They frankly stand as men amazed, bewildered, and dismayed before the great portent of Jesus of Nazareth. But here is a man who takes a different position. He sees in Jesus the Christ from the first. That explains why in the Synoptic Gospels the Messianic conception of Jesus grows gradually, whereas in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is regarded as the Christ, the Light of the World, the One who was to come from first to last, without any hesitation, and without any doubt. The writer of the Gospel is a man of great soul, and of

keen religious insight. He has entered more deeply into the life of the Lord Jesus Christ than any man of his time—more deeply even than the great Apostle Paul; and he was a man who, if he had not intimate personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus, had that spiritual acquaintance with Him which is yet more precious, and as real. That his acquaintance with Jesus was “after the flesh” may be inferred from the fact that in this Gospel the humanity of our Lord is as clearly indicated as in any of the others. It is by no means impossible to believe that even in old age the Apostle may have given to some amanuensis or disciple his own interpretation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he gave it for a purpose—that men might believe, that the troubled life of his time might be penetrated once again with this great Light, that those who were perverting and destroying the real aim and purpose of the Christian teaching might be brought back again to the Truth, and that he

might hold up before them Jesus as the Christ.¹

The importance of this Gospel does not, of course, lie in its literary completeness, in its literary beauty, or in the history which it may be said to teach. The importance of it is in its great apologetic purpose, and it is with this that we really have to do here. We have set before us here a picture of Jesus Christ, and an interpretation of Him, which comes from the end of this first century, when opinion about Jesus was beginning to crystallise, when the old traditions were being sifted, and when the meaning of them was being set before men. We have this picture as the expression of the thought of the best teacher, perhaps, in the Church of the day, and we want to know what it means. The really important thing is not the

¹ It is important to remember that the Gospel was written at the time when men lived in expectation of the end of all things, and that the end was in the minds of Christians closely connected with the person and coming of our Lord.

stories that are told, but the portrait that is thrown upon the canvas and the Personality that lies behind it. The Christology of this book, as we say, its interpretation of Jesus Christ, is its most outstanding feature, and that which specially concerns us just now.

In the Synoptic Gospels we find that Jesus Christ is represented as standing in a unique relation to God upon the one hand, and to the human race upon the other. In the Fourth Gospel we find a definite theory of this relationship. It is said, first of all, that He is the Logos, the Word of God. That prologue to the Gospel which tells us this is a very remarkable document. It at once, as the critics say, strikes an artificial note; it at once seeks to give us, not a picture of Jesus, but an interpretation of Jesus, and an interpretation couched in the language and forms of thought peculiar to the time and place at which it was written. But there is nothing illegitimate in that. The very thing that we need to do is to interpret

Jesus Christ in the forms of our own day. It is the one thing the Christian Church is crying out for more than any other, and it is the lack of it that makes theology often so unreal and unworthy a thing. We cannot blame the men of the early Church because they read Jesus Christ and sought to interpret Him and His work in the forms of their own thought, and used the familiar term Logos to express the Word that was with God, and the Word that was God. The idea is taken from the current philosophy, as it meets us in the Jew Philo. But in the Johannine conception there is very much more than was taught by Philo. Those who have studied the Logos speculations in Greek philosophy realise what a wide and deep gulf separates this Gospel from any of these fantastic systems. Very few of the powers which are attributed to the Logos are attributed by the writer of the Gospel to Jesus Christ. We rise at once out of the strange and artificial atmosphere which the Alexandrian

philosophy breathes. There is a real attempt on the part of a real man to interpret things which are to him as real as they are precious. Jesus to this man was God's Word, the ultimate and absolute expression of God to man ; in Jesus Christ he would have men see God ; He is to them the reflection of the Father, and through Him they enter into the Father's presence ; and it is only in and by Him that God can be known. So we have it that Jesus Christ is the Truth, the final expression of God's Truth to the world, and that if men want to come at the Truth—and it was a great quest in those days, as it is still—it is in Christ that they will find it, and only in Him. So, again, Jesus Christ is the Way to the Father, and men must walk in that Way if they would know God. They must do His will if they would know of the doctrine. To this writer Jesus Christ was the Key to God ; He was God manifest in the flesh. It was not some fantastic dream of the Christ of which he

spake these things, it was the very Jesus of whom Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been writing, and of whom he too was able to write, as a man amongst men, moving in and out among them, doing and saying strange things, but all the time one of themselves. And it was this Jesus who to him was the Christ, the Word of God, the last and complete expression of God's grace, power, and truth to the children of men.

Then as to His relation to men. The book contains a series of wonderful allegories expounding the relation of Jesus Christ to the children of men. He is, for instance, the Bread of Life. Men must eat His flesh and drink His blood if they would live indeed. It is objected that this involves a high sacramental doctrine which would be an anachronism in the writer of this Gospel. But it is needless to read into the words anything more than their plain surface meaning, "I am the Bread of Life"—the daily Food of our humanity. Eating

Him, assimilating Him, making Him ours, we shall be able to live, and obtain the strength we need. We shall grow, and only so be able to grow. As Jesus is the Bread, so also He is the Water of life, and they who drink of this Water shall never thirst. The simile is full of meaning. Jesus knows and answers all needs of this humanity of ours. According to this writer, in Jesus Christ is the answer of every human desire, and the quenching of all human thirst. He has before his mind the familiar picture of the whole of humanity, all through the ages, thirsting for God. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" The answer to this cry, he says, is in Jesus Christ, and it has never been answered in any better way, and never can be. "He that drinketh of this water shall never thirst."

Then Jesus is the good Shepherd, the

Shepherd of His sheep: "He giveth His life for the sheep." That, again, is another far-reaching and expressive image. He takes care of His people, tends them, is their Guide, their Saviour, their Friend, stands between them and their peril, delivers them at the sacrifice of Himself. It is sometimes too readily supposed that the doctrines of the Person of Jesus Christ were the growth of speculation in the fourth century. But there is a great deal of doctrine, when we come to examine it, in this Gospel of St. John, which was written long before the fourth century. There are to be found here the seeds, the beginnings of all that interpretation of Jesus on which the thought of the Christian Church has been built all through the ages until now. There is the parable of the Vine and the Branches, teaching us that His disciples are to be knit to Him so closely that the life sap shall come through Him into their lives, and that their lives shall be utterly and absolutely dependent upon Him—the

closest possible connection of a very wonderful and even miraculous kind. Here as well as in the teaching of St. Paul is the doctrine of the mystical union of the soul of man with Christ.

As Dr. Fairbairn says: "The abstract terms, Word, Light, Life, Spirit, are not abstract to him [*i.e.* to St. John]: they have all a mystic personal quality. Out of them looks the face of Jesus, and His look was love. And so it was but natural that the history should be to John most real where it was most symbolical. Christ was to him in very truth the Son of God, and God the Father of Jesus Christ."¹

We must now try to estimate the significance of such a picture of Jesus Christ, wrought out of the experience of this disciple, and set forth here before the world not very long after Jesus Christ Himself had died, when men who had known Him were perhaps even living still. When we come to examine it in relation to the similar testimony of

¹ *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 346.

a man like the Apostle Paul, are we not forced to the conclusion that when the human soul comes to reflect upon Jesus Christ, and by following Him to obtain experience of His grace and power, *the result is always the same?* There is the same exalted impression of His power, the same utter dependence upon His grace, the same recognition of the divine in Him.

There are two words in this Gospel which are very frequently used. The first is the word "believe," and the second the word "witness." Men are asked to believe in Jesus. "To those that believe" is the promise of the Gospel given. The writer does not say that the mystery of Jesus Christ is made manifest to the clever and the wise; he does not say that the secret of Jesus Christ is declared even to those who simply seek it, but he does say that it is made manifest to him who believes. That is the challenge which the Person of Jesus Christ still throws out. It is "who-soever believeth." That with us has become

almost a cant phrase. It is an easy kind of thing to say in a sermon or at a revival meeting, but there is a meaning behind it, and we need to get back to the original and true meaning of it. To believe in Jesus Christ is to do something more than think about Him and to have an opinion concerning Him. It means to bow before Him in reverence ; to take Him at His word ; to do His will ; to begin walking in His way ; to make the great surrender ; to accept His teaching as though it were true, and prove by practising it. The man who so deals with Christ is the man who in the end finds out His secret and is able to say, " My Lord and my God." He then becomes a witness to His name. What he has found in Jesus Christ for himself, he is constrained to make known to others. " He believes and therefore also he speaks." He cannot but make known the things he has seen and heard. The attitude is one with which we are familiar, but we can readily understand how exalted must be the posi-

tion of one who is held worthy of this faith and of this testimony. This is the attitude which the writer of the Fourth Gospel takes up towards Jesus Christ. He is the object of faith, and his own function among men is to bear witness to His glory. The two things together, belief and witnessing, become the proof of Jesus Christ to the soul, but they are also evidence of His divine power and claims. As Hermann Schultz has said: "Faith in the historical Christ does not at all involve deciding points of historical science, as, for instance, the problems with which the investigations of the life of Jesus have to deal. It is not at all a question of anything that scientific criticism could throw doubt upon, of anything merely past: but of an active personality that has stamped itself as living on the spiritual history of man, and whose reality as it is in itself any one can test by its effects, as immediately as he can test the reality of the nature that surrounds him and the relations in which he stands."

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRIST OF THE APOCALYPSE

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The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass ; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.—REV. i. 1.

THIS book of Revelation stands by itself in the New Testament. It is a very familiar book, and to many it is very attractive, and yet its secret is a very hard one to discover. It is a product of the prophetic spirit, and we have not the key to the prophecy which it contains. It purports to be written by one John ; and the first question that arises is as to the identity of its author. The traditional view is that it is the same John who wrote the Gospel and the Epistles : John the apostle, the disciple whom Jesus loved, the son of

Zebedee. But it is very difficult indeed to believe that this book was written by the hand that wrote the Fourth Gospel. There is the same contrast here that is found in the Gospels themselves. This disciple whom Jesus loved, and who leaned on Jesus' bosom, was also, we are told, the disciple who was called Boanerges, the Son of Thunder. He might well have written the book of Revelation as Boanerges the Son of Thunder. There is something of the passion and exaltation and power and threatening of the book that a Son of Thunder would write. But it is as difficult to imagine the Son of Thunder writing the Fourth Gospel as it is to imagine the disciple whom Jesus loved writing the Apocalypse. This, however, is not the only difficulty. The language in which the Fourth Gospel is written is smooth, easy, good Greek; the language in which the Revelation, or Apocalypse, is written is rough, ungrammatical, and colloquial Greek; and it is quite evident that in some parts of it the writer

was thinking in Hebrew while he wrote in Greek. There is an entire contrast between the language of the two books. There is a similar contrast in the thought of the two books. In the Apocalypse the kingdom of God is generally described as future, while in the Gospel it is regarded as ideally present among men.

It should be noted, however, that in addition to these points of difference there is this curious phenomenon, that the language and phraseology of the book recall constantly the language and phraseology of the Fourth Gospel, and the aspect which is given to Jesus Christ in the book is again and again the aspect given to Him in the Fourth Gospel.¹ It is not therefore to be wondered at that opinions on the book should be very much divided. Some believe that John wrote all the books that are

¹ Speaking of the linguistic evidence, Swete says: "It creates a strong presumption of affinity between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse, notwithstanding their great diversity both in language and in thought."—*The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. cxxv.

known by his name in the New Testament ; others believe that some were written by the Apostle, and some by John the Presbyter, that John of Asia who is so strange and evanescent a figure in early church history, but who seems to solve a good many difficulties. Some think that he wrote the Apocalypse and that the Apostle wrote the Gospel ; some think that the Apostle wrote the Apocalypse and the Presbyter wrote the Gospel ; and the question must still be regarded as *sub judice*. For us, however, it does not really matter who wrote the book. Its power, its inspiration, its teaching, its use for us do not depend upon our being able to attach it with any accuracy to some historic or apostolic name, but rather depend upon the appeal which the book makes to men and the response which men make to that appeal.

So, putting the question of authorship on one side, we come to the question of date ; and here, without entering into particulars, we may assume that we must look for the

date of this book about the year A.D. 90. Roughly speaking, the book must lie between the years A.D. 70 and 90; and there are good reasons for believing that it must lie nearer the year A.D. 90 than A.D. 70. It seems to represent a time when the Church had some kind of organisation and some kind of standing, a time of persecution, and a time when persecution had already grown old.

And so we come to the question, Why was the book written, and to what class of literature does it belong? This is the really important point. It is an apocalypse, a revelation. It purports to contain the words of Jesus Christ through His angel, to His servant, for His Church, and it belongs to a large class of literature. Much of this literature has only been discovered and made available within comparatively recent times; and we know now how a book like this springs, as it were, largely out of the seething under-world of vision and revelation that was common to the Jewish and to the

Jewish Christian people of the time. It has close affinities with many similar books, like the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Enoch, and the Book of Esdras, all of them strange and obscure writings, of the meaning of which we still know very little, yet which are closely paralleled by much that we find in this book. And it was a class of literature that sprang out of the circumstances of the day. It is a tract for the times, and a tract of the times. It comes from the very need of the people, and it is addressed to the need of the people. One theory regarding the book of Revelation is that it is a Jewish apocalypse worked up by a Christian writer; another is that portions of a Jewish apocalypse have been embodied in this book of ours. But whether that be so or not, it is certain that the book contains a very strong Jewish element, and that throughout it a thread of Christian teaching runs, even if it is extremely difficult to disentangle that thread at any particular point. The book is penetrated with the

Christian spirit, even though the background of the writer's mind be strongly Jewish.¹ All this explains how the book is to be related to the general mass of apocalyptic literature, and it gives the key to most of its peculiarities, and to some of its difficulties. It helps us to see that those

¹ "It is not only in regard to pseudonymity and other matters of literary form that our apocalyptist differs from his Jewish predecessors : the cleavage goes deeper. Whatever view may be taken of his indebtedness to Jewish sources, there can be no doubt that he has produced a book which, taken as a whole, is profoundly Christian, and widely removed from the field in which Jewish apocalyptic occupied itself. The narrow sphere of Jewish national hopes has been exchanged for the life and aims of a society whose field is the world and whose goal is the conquest of the human race. The Jewish Messiah, an uncertain and unrealised idea, has given place to the historical personal Christ, and the Christ of the Christian Apocalypse is already victorious, ascended, and glorified. Thus the faith and hope of the Church have diverted apocalyptic thought into new channels, and provided it with ends worthy of its pursuit. The tone of St. John's book presents a contrast to the Jewish apocalypses which is not less marked. It breathes a religious spirit which is not that of its predecessors ; it is marked with the sign of the Cross ; the note of patient suffering, unabashed faith, tender love of the brethren, hatred of evil, invincible hope."—Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 25.

things in the book which to the modern mind are so strange and so difficult to comprehend, had their place and part in the thought of the people at the time when the book was written, and were not altogether obscure to them.

We may venture to suggest that it is an altogether useless exercise to try and explain the visions which this book contains. The explanation of a few of them lies, no doubt, on the surface, and we may take it and use it for what it is worth. We cannot tell exactly what the seals, the beasts and the trumpets and the candlesticks and all these strange figures portended; and we do not need to know. The attempt to identify this or that figure in the book with this or that historical figure or event (*e.g.* Napoleon or the French Revolution) is manifestly absurd. What we have to do is rather to try and discover the teaching of this book for the people of the day, that we may be able, through them and through our knowledge of their circumstances and of their

experience, to discover what such a book may have to say to us. That is something we can easily and ought gladly to do. What was it that this book was written to effect? The student of the book will do well to mark carefully those letters to the seven Churches with which the book begins. The writer, a man of authority in the Asian Churches, a man who had some kind of justification for speaking, and for speaking as he did, writes in the name of Christ—in the name of the living, exalted Christ—to these Churches, and he writes to them because of the situation in which they find themselves. They are persecuted, cast down, tormented; evil is at work among them; they have lost their first love; corruption has entered into their midst; they are in peril of apostasy; they are as sheep in the midst of wolves. These Churches are small Christian communities, situated in a heathen world. All round them is the persecuting power of the Roman Empire, which to the mind of the writer appears portentous and awful in its

majesty and in its might. This empire owns no king in Jesus Christ, and will set up the emperor, a mere man of straw and clay, and force these poor Christians to worship him or to die the death. The writer of the apocalypse had a keen sense of the horror and wickedness of this position, of the degradation that it meant to human nature, and of the insult it offered to Jesus Christ. And so he writes his word of encouragement, of authority, of warning, and of denunciation. He is now the Son of Thunder. His powerful and vehement words are, to use his own picturesque phrases, like a great sharp sword coming out of his mouth, and a flame of fire coming out of his eyes, and evil-doers whom he assails are scorched and pierced by them. But the fire of his words not only scorches, it redeems and sanctifies. Those who seek God, and those who seek forgiveness, shall find all that they seek. Those who die in the Lord are blessed. The flame of persecution may come and wither the life out of a man, but the man still lives. He has died in the

Lord, for Christ's sake, in Christ's cause; and the words spoken to these poor folk, who were in daily peril of such death, are the greatest, the most comforting, and most assuring words in all Scripture. They have been chosen by Christian people and by the Christian Church from that day to this as the best words of comfort for those who mourn. And thus there is given to these people in persecution a glowing assurance of the final triumph of Christ and of His kingdom. It cannot be, it shall not be, that even though this great Roman Empire may triumph for the moment, the empire of the King of kings shall fail. The note that runs through the book is one of astonishing faith, and is one of absolute assurance; and there is nothing in all Christian literature better calculated than this to uplift and hearten the children of God in the time of their need.

But we turn now to our more special subject. What is the delineation of Jesus Christ which we find in such a book as this ?

It should be noted that the picture of Jesus Christ drawn here is altogether characteristic of the writer. We have already seen how men had begun to conceive Jesus as the Christ within a comparatively short time of His life here on earth. Here we are at a time removed by some decades from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. We are dealing with people who have known Him and worshipped Him and formed churches in His name for some years past; we are dealing with people who have learned to stand up for Jesus Christ against the power of the persecutor, and learned that it was better to die for Christ than live for the world, the flesh, or the devil. It is natural, therefore, to ask what attitude these people took up to Jesus Christ, and what their teachers told them about Him. It is probably true, as one modern writer says, that this book gives us a better idea than any other part of the New Testament of the way in which Jesus Christ was actually preached to the people of the early Church. He is

to them the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End ; He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords ; He is at the right hand of God ; He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne ; He is the one Power in heaven and on earth with whom they have most to do ; He is God's Vicegerent ; He is God's Word ; He is God's Messenger, Prophet, and Priest, and He is King and Lord over all. And this is the historic Christ. All through this book there is traceable the fact that the writer was in close touch with the memory of the historic Jesus. He is not simply making for himself a fiction of the imagination. He is idealising, he is translating into the highest forms, so to speak, the figure of the historic Jesus—One who was dead, but is now alive for evermore. That picture of which we read in the first chapter, " One like unto a Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white

as snow, and His eyes were as a flame of fire," is idealistic ; but behind that there is a human figure, and behind the whole book there is to be found the historical Jesus. To these people, their imagination, their faith, their need, and their patience, this Jesus had become highly exalted, "the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely," the Person in heaven and earth with whom they were chiefly concerned, and the Power which was able to help them in the time of their need. There is no doubt that Jesus Christ had come to have to these people in their day of tribulation the religious value of God. He was to them the Way of Life, the Shepherd of the sheep, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the One who was able to make of men and women kings and priests unto God. This is the significant thing ; and in this figure of the Christ, in this conception of the Christ, these people found their comfort and their strength. Knowing Him as they did, believing in Him as they did, they were ready

and glad to die for Him ; knowing Him and believing in Him as they did, they felt that to live for Him and in His confession was the greatest possible thing they could do. And the Lord Jesus Christ, strange and surprising as their conception of Him may seem, was known by the men and women of the early Church as a living presence and a power that made them the men and women they were.

If we attempt to analyse the conception of Jesus Christ that is given here, something of the following kind must be said. There is no Christology in the book, or, rather, no definite and organised Christology. There is no attempt on the part of the writer to give systematic shape and form to his conception. It has to be pieced together from many scattered references. It comes in flashes, and it is not in any sense an ordered and recognised doctrine. But on certain points the teaching of the writer is clear. We find that Jesus Christ was to His Church, as He was to St. Paul, a continual and

abiding presence. These early Christians did not believe in a dead Christ. They did not look back wistfully to the grave in the Garden and seek Him there. He was with them, their Friend and Saviour, their continual help, and they saw Him, many of them, descending from heaven in the smoke of their martyr fires; they felt Him present by their racked and tortured frames; He spoke to them healing words, and gave them His strength. To His Church He was the source and ground of salvation and of life.

And this Christ was to them also the Prophet of God. In Him they found the very Word of God to their souls. The Logos, that great conception of which their minds were so full, was incarnate in Him and became to them God's Word, and they listened to what He had to say as to the very Voice of God. To these Christians Christ was the Word, not in any technical or metaphysical sense, but as imparting to them the truth of God. He was to them

the Truth as well as the Way, and in His word they found their law of life.

And then again, Jesus was to these men the great High-priest. Sometimes they conceived Him as the Victim and the Sacrifice, but always as the great Intercessor, who stands between God and man. He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and He receives, forgives, and comforts His people. There is nothing in the whole Bible stronger than the teaching which we find in this book about the intercessory and atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He takes there the great prerogative of God. The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins. The book is penetrated throughout with that idea, and it was one of the ideas that had come home to the heart of the Christian Church concerning Jesus Christ, that in Him alone is forgiveness to be found.

And then He is the King of kings. The writer displays his powers of imagination most vividly in depicting the great con-

summation of all things in Jesus Christ, of the City of God sent down from heaven, of the New Jerusalem, when God's rule shall be established in righteousness. This book is the great missionary book in the Bible, though the fact is not always recognised. It looks forward to the time when Christ shall reign everywhere and over every one; to the time when God's kingdom shall be perfected, when every knee shall bow to Jesus and every tongue shall call Him Lord; and it looks forward to that time not as to some infinitely distant vision, but as a practical reality. In those days Christians generally, like the writer of this book, felt that they had a part in this great business. It would be well if the Christian Church to-day had anything like the missionary vision which these old saints, these persecuted saints, had. If there were anything like this belief in Jesus Christ and His power in the Christian Church at the present time the missionary interest would occupy a far larger place in our thoughts than it does. There

are few things in the New Testament more remarkable than the wide vision of the early Church and her splendid faith in the adaptability of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the needs of the whole world. Modern Christians should keep this example before them. They should be as eager as their fathers were to make the Word of this Christ, who is King of kings, known throughout the length and breadth of the earth. It may be questioned sometimes whether Christians now really believe, as the writer of this book most assuredly believed, that Jesus Christ will reign for ever and ever. Do they think it is possible or practicable that the whole world, every nation, tribe, and tongue, shall come under the dominion of Jesus Christ? Until they have attained to this faith they are not likely to possess the power of the men to whom this apocalypse was first addressed.

This book also makes Jesus Christ not only the future King of the universe, but the guarantee of the everlasting life of the

children of men. We are all familiar with those exquisite words in which the writer speaks of the life beyond the grave—words of comfort and hope that have come home to men and women so often since. We do not need to be reminded that this is all attached to Jesus Christ, to His resurrection, and to the life that He imparts through love and faith in His name. The complaint is sometimes heard that the belief in immortality is dying out of the Christian Church at the present time. This is perhaps natural among those to whom the lines have fallen in pleasant places: but in days of persecution, when death is always near, and sometimes even preferable to life, the belief in immortality will revive. It was strong enough in those days when men and women went gladly to be burned or to the wild beasts in the arena; and it says much for their attitude to Jesus Christ that He was able to guarantee to them a hope which lifted them above both fear and shame. They believed that at His final

coming all things would be made new, wrong would be redressed, and sorrow and sighing would flee away. Speaking generally, then, we may say that this book makes Jesus Christ divine. The thought of the writer looks back to One who was greater than any presentation of Him that he was able to give. Bousset puts the matter in the true light when he says, "What we have here is a layman's faith undisturbed by any theological reflection, a faith which with untroubled *naïveté* simply identifies Christ in His predicates and attributes with God, and, on the other hand also calmly takes over quite archaic elements."¹ It is the very naturalness and simplicity of this process which witnesses to the greatness of the Person who possessed such a hold over the mind of this writer, and appealed so powerfully both to his imagination and to his faith.

¹ Quoted by Denney from *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, p. 280,

CHAPTER V
THE TEACHING OF CHRIST ABOUT
HIMSELF

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THE TEACHING OF CHRIST ABOUT HIMSELF

Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am.—ST. JOHN xiii. 13.

MUCH has been written about the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ, and the subject is certainly a fascinating one. It must be approached, however, with reverence, and needs far other equipment than merely that of the textual and historical critic. The questions involved are of more than antiquarian interest. They deeply affect the interpretation of modern Christianity and the religious life of men. What Jesus said to men about Himself is our only clue to His own thought about Himself and His mission. But it is a clue that only leads us a little way. On any estimation of Him Jesus will be judged

to be far above the average of His day both in intelligence and in spiritual insight. His teaching therefore was necessarily conditioned by the capacity of His hearers. It was impossible for Him to impart to them His full mind, for they were not able to receive it. The men of to-day, with all their disadvantages, are probably nearer to the mind of Christ than His own disciples were. The centuries of religious experience have done their work, and we have entered into the inheritance they bring. Therefore in seeking to investigate the testimony of Jesus to Himself, we have not only to beware of our own mental and spiritual preconceptions, but also to take into account the character of the material with which He had to deal, and the local conditions and circumstances He had to meet.

But in addition to these things we must also give due weight to the fact that it is often impossible to distinguish between the teaching of Jesus and the impressions which

His reporters formed concerning Him. It will be necessary sometimes to endeavour to get behind these impressions, and to discover, if possible, how far they are based on the words and actions of Jesus Himself. We must even be prepared for the conclusion that much of what they witness concerning Him is the result of their own reflection after the event in the light of the religious ideas then current. On the other hand, there is no doubt that in many of the records they give us we may trace directly the hand or tongue of Jesus Himself. The story of the Temptation is a case in point. It is impossible to account for this on any other assumption than that it came direct from the mouth of Jesus, and that it expresses, in a parabolic form suited to the intelligence of His hearers, an experience which to Jesus Himself was of immense import in the conception of His mission on earth. The form of it belongs entirely to the thought of His day, but behind this we can discover ideas

which were original, and must have great weight in determining our interpretation of the mind of Christ. Much the same may be said of the various presentations of the work and Person of Jesus which are given by the author of the Fourth Gospel. Here it is the writer who supplies the form, while the ideas again are those of Jesus Himself. It is impossible to doubt that behind the familiar terms, Good Shepherd, Bread of Life, Light of the World, and the like, are to be found certain ideas of Jesus concerning Himself and His work. To the writer of this Gospel these ideas appealed more vividly than to others. He understood them, and he uses them to do for others what they had done for him. They are not his, however, though he gave them shape. Without the creative suggestion of the Master they would not have been.

But we must turn now to those more definite presentations of Himself which all the stories of Jesus convey, and which

shine out as original through all the limitations of the records. The first of these is the name Son of man, which was Jesus' chosen and characteristic name for Himself. There is nothing new about it but its application in this connection. It is a familiar term, with a given and accepted meaning, in current apocalyptic literature. He, however, puts His own interpretation upon it, so that, like so many familiar things, it becomes transfigured in His hands. As Harnack says, it is difficult to interpret the term without reading into it philosophical ideas which were alien to the thought of Jesus. Nevertheless this much may be said—viz. that the name signified a unique and representative relation to humanity. It is often used in connection with the authority which Jesus claimed to forgive and save. It is connected with His founding and consummation of the kingdom of heaven. It witnesses clearly enough to His consciousness of a divine prerogative and of a power to be used in the service of mankind.

In other words, it contains within itself the seeds of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Its frequent and almost exclusive use in the Gospels as our Lord's designation of Himself throws, as Sanday says, "a vivid light on the high character for trustworthiness of our Gospels. It is often argued that particular expressions or ideas come from St. Paul, or from the theology of the early Church. Here is an expression that certainly does not come from either: the evidence for it in any such connection is infinitesimal. Really it can only go back to our Lord Himself, and it bears speaking testimony to the fidelity with which His words have been preserved."¹

The use of this title is also one among many other indications that Jesus thought of Himself as the Messiah. Dalman goes so far as to say, "The designation was chosen by Jesus with the express purpose that the people might transfer their thoughts

¹ *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, p. 125.

of the Messiah to Himself.”¹ There can be no doubt that in claiming to be the Messiah Jesus was very far from endorsing the popular ideas on the subject. Here, again, He read His own meaning into the current term, and interpreted in His own way the ideas and hopes of His contemporaries. In the New Testament the Messianic claim is indicated by the use of the names, the Christ, Son of God, Son of David, Lord, and the like. To the popular mind the hope of the Messiah was intensely national and political. It had also, it is true, a certain eschatological significance, but this was secondary. To the mind of Jesus Himself the political significance of the idea was of very little importance, while its spiritual and eschatological meanings were primary. Jesus read into the age-long hopes of the people of Jehovah a new meaning, and a meaning that was all His own. He claimed to fulfil these ancient expectations, but to fulfil them in a fashion

¹ *Die Worte Jesu*, p. 251.

which suited His own deeply religious conception of their needs. The bondage under which the Israel of His day groaned was to Him a far more grievous thing than the Roman yoke, and the deliverance which He brought was something far more than a political and social emancipation. This goes far to explain the undoubted fact that Jesus did not so much claim to be the Messiah as accept the office when it was thrust upon Him. He made no definite bid for the position, but allowed the idea to grow in the minds of His followers, and seemed Himself to acquiesce in it rather than assert it. We may agree with Bousset when he says in this connection : “Why, then, this entire and almost anxious reluctance? We can only find the answer to this question, in my opinion, in one direction. Jesus Himself in this matter was under a difficulty which He could not overcome : He must have been overmastered by a deep and immediate feeling that the title of Messiah was quite inadequate to

express what, in His own inner consciousness, He knew Himself to be.”¹ It is therefore almost beside the mark to quote the prophetic and apocalyptic writings as to the Messiah in reference to the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. These testify abundantly to the nature of the popular conception of the office in Israel. But it was His work to transform that popular conception, and read it afresh in His own terms.

How He did this can best be understood by studying the idea of the kingdom of God as He proclaimed it in relation to His own Person and mission. The kingdom is in the mind of Jesus sometimes the domain within which the Messiah exercises authority, and sometimes the authority or rule which He exercises. His Gospel is the Gospel of the kingdom. In interpreting the kingdom to His contemporaries Jesus linked Himself in thought directly with the prophets of the Old Testament. He had before His

¹ *Jesus*, p. 85.

mind the idea of a theocracy, of a reign of God in righteousness and peace over a holy people. But while he laid thus much stress on the notion of a kingdom, He repudiated effectually, if tacitly, all those political expectations which bulked so largely in the minds of Jews under the Roman domination. If He came to restore the kingdom to Israel, it was in a sense of which Israel had hardly dreamed. He looked forward to a new earth as well as to a new heaven, but He realised that the change would come, not by means of any political or social revolution, but by the slow working of the leaven of God's Spirit in human hearts. To His vision the kingdom was a "far-off, divine event," but it was also "at hand," among or within the men to whom He was speaking. It needed to be recognised and entered into, and it was His function to show men the way. Thus Jesus described the conditions of entrance into God's kingdom, and the life and atmosphere of the kingdom, in terms

which were almost exclusively moral and religious. The door of the kingdom was open only to those who would repent, to the humble and child-like spirits, the meek, the hungry, and the poor. The benefits of the kingdom were not place and power; to sit at the right or left hand of the throne were not privileges that He could give: they were to be expressed, rather, in terms of the higher life—forgiveness, holiness, peace with God, and eternal life. The aims and character of the kingdom are described by Jesus in a series of inimitable parables, all of which go to show that He was conscious of an authority which allowed Him to be the interpreter of the idea to men. In phrases like “My kingdom is not of this world,” and “He that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist,” He acknowledged His own rights in the kingdom, and at the same time clearly distinguished His conception from that of the patriots and zealots of His day. He gave a strictly

religious and ethical interpretation to the ideals which they cherished. The references to the kingdom in the literature of the early Church, meagre though they are, show that His teaching in regard to it was so far at least understood and accepted by His followers, however alien it may have been to their preconceived ideas on the subject.

Jesus is Himself the Key and the Door to the kingdom. Men enter it by entering into relations with Himself. It is by repentance, forgiveness, and faith, and in regard to all these His action is crucial, and His authority supreme. The life of the kingdom has a righteousness of its own, but one that is more than a mere morality, having its roots in a spiritual relation with God through Jesus Christ. If we may add the testimony of the Fourth Gospel to that of the Synoptists, it becomes still clearer that Jesus regarded Himself both as the source and the sustainer of the new life enjoyed by those who entered the kingdom through faith in His name.

There is yet another respect in which Jesus' own conception both of the Messiah and of the kingdom differed widely from that of His contemporaries, and that is in regard to the place and function of His death. To the Jew a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms. A close study of the Gospels shows that the necessity for His sacrificial and redeeming death occupied in the consciousness of Jesus a far larger place than has generally been supposed. He came into the world to die, and the knowledge of the fact was with Him throughout. No doubt it grew in intensity as the tragedy of His life developed, but from the first it shaped His conception of His mission and of His relation to the world of men. Though in the teaching of Jesus, as we have it, this great idea is only thrown out incidentally, it was evidently so large a part of His own thought as to impress His followers, and prepare the way for that preaching of the Cross which became so marked a feature in the work of the early

Church. On no other assumption can this be accounted for. That "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," was no invention of the Apostles, but rather the necessary interpretation of the facts forced upon them by their remembrance of the words and attitude of Jesus Himself. As Dr. Fairbairn has said: "We have to consider both the Apostles and the theory. It was a belief of stupendous originality: they were persons of no intellectual attainments, and of small inventive faculty. So far as the Gospels enable us to judge, they are curiously deficient in imagination, and of timid understanding. They were remarkable for their inability to draw obvious conclusions, to transcend the commonplace and comprehend the unfamiliar, or to find a rational reason for the extraordinary. Such men might dream dreams and see visions, but to invent an absolutely novel intellectual conception as to their Master's person and death—a conception that changed man's view of God, of sin, of

humanity, of history; in a word, of all things human and divine—was surely a feat beyond them.”¹ That their conception of the death of Jesus may be traced to Jesus Himself is clearly seen in the accounts given in the Gospels of the institution of the Lord’s Supper. The language used there points unmistakably to the piacular and consecrating elements in the Jewish sacrifices, and cannot be understood without some transference of these ideas to the action of Jesus Himself. “The blood of the new covenant” is a phrase which cannot be interpreted in any other way. In the mind of Jesus His death bore a relation to human sin and need analogous to that attributed to the sacrifices and offerings of the old dispensation. However far certain subsequent interpretations of the fact may take us from the actual mind of Christ, there can be no doubt that the whole conception originated with Him. The fact is

¹ “Christ’s Attitude to His own death,” *Expositor*, 1896, p. 282.

the more remarkable because Jesus was not in any sense a gloomy ascetic. He knew and shared with other men the joy of living; but He knew too the deeper joy of redemption, sacrifice, and service.

Closely allied with the claim of Jesus to forgive and save is His assumption of the office of Judge. He is Himself the standard by which the hearts and thoughts of men are to be tried, and in the last great day it is the Son of man who will be upon the throne, judging the quick and the dead. We need not hesitate to admit that this eschatological teaching of Jesus is coloured by the temper and expectations of His age, and that it is not always easy to distinguish between His own words on the subject and the interpretations of the evangelists. But when all allowance has been made for this, the fact remains that in the most primitive part of the Gospels the claim of Jesus to come again in judgment is both unmistakable and characteristic. He will reward men according to their works; He will sit

upon the throne of His glory, and all nations will appear before Him. He will separate the good from the evil as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. And, more than this, the standard of judgment will be the relation in which men and women in this life have stood towards Himself. "Inasmuch as ye did it (or did it not) to one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it (or did it not) unto Me." This claim was recognised in the early Church in such words as those of St. Paul, "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." There can be no question what this claim meant in the eyes of the contemporaries of Jesus and what He therefore intended to convey by it. It sets the Son of man on the throne of the universe. It attributes to Him a prerogative which belongs to God. It involves, as has been said, "an ascent from the throne of David to that of God." In the Old Testament and in Jewish writings generally God is regarded as the Judge of all the earth, and Jesus here as Messiah

exercises this supreme function for Him. It is the most exalted of the Messianic claims, and as Dr. Charles says, "Here we have the Christ of the Gospels claiming not only to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies of the various ideals of the Messiah, but also to discharge the functions of God Himself in relation to the kingdom."¹

What these and other similar claims signified in the consciousness of Jesus we cannot take upon ourselves to say. It is impossible, however, to escape the conclusion that in the eyes of His contemporaries He appeared as One who made claims for Himself which distinguished Him altogether from the scribes and teachers with whom they were familiar. They had occasion to remark over and over again that He spake with authority. The note of His life and teaching was that of mastery. Though He humbled Himself, there was neither hesitation nor diffidence about His tone. He moved at ease in the region of spiritual

¹ *Expositor*, 1902, p. 258.

things, and assumed to Himself prerogatives that hitherto had belonged only to God. It is noteworthy also, that, so far as the narratives before us are concerned, men seemed to have no difficulty in accepting Him on His own terms. His attitude caused astonishment, and in purely secular souls resentment of a peculiarly bitter kind, but even the devils believed and trembled. There was that about His “ Verily, verily I say unto you ” which seemed to carry conviction and allay the spirit of controversy. The way in which the early Church used to “ remember the words of the Lord Jesus ” speaks volumes for the vividness of the impression which those words made on those who first heard them. We cannot now reproduce that impression or even imagine it with any great success; but if we wish to do full justice to the situation, we must allow for the result produced, and give to it the weight which it deserves.

Nor must we miss the significance of the claims which Jesus made for our interpreta-

tion of His person to-day. That He offered Himself as the Teacher, Saviour, and Guide of men in so authoritative a fashion is not only testimony as to His own self-consciousness, but serves to regulate our estimate both of His Person and His work. The attitude which He thus took up is inconsistent with any presentation of Him as a merely human teacher. It is one of those prerogatives of the Christ which must be attached to the Jesus of history, and without which the whole Gospel story becomes unintelligible. The study of our Lord's own consciousness of His mission makes it more difficult than ever to draw the hard-and-fast distinction between Jesus and the Christ which finds favour with so many Gospel students at the present time. Nor is it possible to take refuge in the assumption that the Christ idea was in the air, and came naturally in course of time to clothe the Person of Jesus as His followers reflected upon Him. Such a conclusion does nothing but violence to

the facts, and to the accounts of the reluctance with which the first preaching of this message was often received. It was not the pious devotion of the early Christians which made Him the light and the life of men, and attributed to Him saving and forgiving grace. The foundation on which they built was not their own hopes and imaginations, but His own teaching—teaching which they indeed were slow to receive until it had been explained and impressed upon them by a living experience of His power. We must be careful lest in our anxiety to remove the obvious difficulties which such an interpretation of Jesus suggests, we only raise difficulties which are more serious, and at the same time involve ourselves in a theory which is true neither to history nor to the facts of religious experience. In this case, as in all others, the simpler and more obvious course is the best. As Prof. Gwatkin says: “If we know anything for certain about Jesus of Nazareth it is that He steadily claimed to

be the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind, and the ruler of the world to come, and by that claim the Gospel stands or falls.”¹

¹ *Early Church History*, vol. i. p. 54.

CHAPTER VI
THE CHRIST OF THE CREEDS

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And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.—ACTS viii. 37.

THIS passage of Scripture is not found in the text of the Revised Version. It appears there in the margin, because it is not contained in the earliest manuscripts of the Acts of the Apostles; but although that is the case there is no need to reject the verse altogether. It is interesting and important, because it contains the first Christian creed. It is a baptismal formula which belongs no doubt to an early period, probably in the second century, and has crept into the text of this story of Philip and the eunuch by some mistake, but it

remains a very interesting monument of the earliest belief of the Christian Church. It may be regarded as a creed, because all the creeds were originally baptismal formulas. When a man entered the Christian Church, when he was baptized as a Christian, he was baptized in or into the name of Jesus Christ; and if, as he generally was in those days, of adult years, he was asked at the same time to confess his belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The *Didache* (*circ.* A.D. 100) contains the command to baptize "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Now, our study of the Christology of the New Testament so far will have enabled us to realise that this may be regarded as the net result of the thought of the Church about Jesus Christ, at least for the first century and a half of its existence. We have seen how men, dwelling on the story of His early life, teaching, and deeds, had come to the belief that there was in Jesus more than in any other man who had ever been; that

He was worthy of the names Son of man and Son of God; that these names meant that He stood in a special and unique relation to God upon the one hand and to man upon the other; that He had come into the world also with a special purpose, and that this purpose was the redemption of the human race. Therefore men believed that He was not dead, but alive for evermore; that He was all-powerful, able to keep, to sanctify, and to save His people, and that He was worthy of the highest adoration and worship that man could give. Jesus Christ was in this sense lifted up before the eyes of the Christian Church as Son of God and Son of man, the Saviour of the world. But this explanation or expression of Jesus Christ to the mind of the early Church was a process that was largely unconscious, and was generally unphilosophical. It was gradually beaten out, so to speak, under the stress of circumstances, and it found expression for itself in many more or less incidental ways. But we now

come to a period when this attempt to express Jesus Christ to the mind becomes organised and takes to itself a much more elaborate form.

In the early days of the Church the Creed, the expression of belief, was of the simplest possible kind: "I believe in Jesus as the Son of God." Then men began to ask, "What does this mean? How can He be the Son of God? Is He Son of God in any different sense from that in which we may be sons of God?" It became necessary to answer these questions in view of certain false conceptions of Christ which became current. There arose those who denied that Jesus was the Son of God in any sense that was not true also of every man. There arose also those who denied that Jesus was in any sense a true man. They said His manhood was a merely phantasmal thing, something adopted for the time being, and that the essence of His nature was divine. There arose also those who insisted that Jesus Christ was only one

of many revelations of the Godhead, that He was but one link in a great chain of angels, archangels, emanations, and ministers, sent of God to link up this earth with heaven. And so it became necessary for the representatives of the Christian Church to set down in plain speech what they meant by ascribing divine honour and sonship to this Jesus of Nazareth ; and thereupon began the long, painful, and intricate process by which the creeds of Christendom grew up. It is impossible to describe this process in detail, but we may attempt to study very briefly one or two of these creeds, or at least those parts of them that refer especially to Jesus Christ, that we may discover how Christians arrived at those dogmatic statements concerning Jesus which seem to take us so far away from what we are accustomed to consider the simplicity of the Christian Gospel.

First of all, then, there is the Creed which we know to-day as the Apostles', and which

makes the following statements in regard to Jesus Christ :

I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord, Who was conceived from the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

That is not the earliest form of the creed. As we have it, it dates only from somewhere about the end of the fifth century. It was certainly not, as the tradition ran, composed by the apostles themselves. Behind this Creed there was another form of it that was current in the Roman Church at a comparatively early period, *i.e.* during part of the second century; and there is reason to believe that this earliest form of the Creed, so far as the Christological element

in it was concerned, was not greatly different from that which is in use in our churches to-day. We may take it that this is one of the simplest and possibly one of the earliest forms in which the Church stated its definite belief concerning Jesus Christ, and all that need be said of it for the moment is that it provides a convenient bridge between the history as we know it in the Gospels and the later dogmatic statements concerning Jesus. It marks the transition from faith regarded as a simple trust in Jesus Christ to faith regarded as a body of fixed doctrine concerning Christ. The important point to notice is that faith in this latter sense is still closely connected with the historical Person.

But it was in the formation of the Nicene Creed that Christian doctrine concerning Jesus Christ became for the first time set and stereotyped. We cannot here describe in detail the great conflict that culminated in Nicæa between the two protagonists, Arius, on the one hand, and Athanasius

on the other. The controversy arose naturally out of the various attempts which were being made to give more philosophical form to the definitions of the earlier Creed. Hatch finds an instance of such expansion of the Creed in the letter sent by Hymenæus, Bishop of Jerusalem, and his colleagues to Paul of Samosata: The faith which had been handed down from the beginning is that "God is unbegotten, one, without beginning, unseen, unchangeable, whom no man hath seen or can see, whose glory and greatness it is impossible for human nature to trace out adequately; but we must be content to have a moderate conception of Him. His Son reveals Him. As He Himself says, 'No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son revealeth Him.' We confess and proclaim His begotten Son the only-begotten, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, the wisdom and word and power of God, being before the worlds,

God, not by foreknowledge, but by essence and substance.”¹

It is a familiar story how Arius, the presbyter of Alexandria, set up as against the teaching of his bishop, the idea that Jesus was a creature, that is to say, was created, like all other things but, that He was the first of created beings. This idea of Arius, with all that followed from it in regard to the subordination of the Son to the Father and in regard to the relationship of the Son, not to the Father only but to the universe, which was created through the Son, became a type of doctrine which spread very rapidly throughout the whole Church of the day. There is this to be said about it. Heretical as it was afterwards judged to be, it was at least nearer to New Testament teaching than some of the teaching which was afterwards judged to be orthodox. It is necessary, if we would follow the history of the time, and realise how the ideas concerning Jesus

¹ *Hibbert Lecture*, p. 327.

Christ which became orthodox arose and became dominant, that we should clearly understand the position which Arius takes up. He bases his whole teaching on the theistic position. He starts from the idea of the One and absolute God, and he sees in Jesus the incarnation of God's Logos, itself created in order to create the material world. In its more extreme forms the doctrine came to mean that Jesus was not divine, and that He could not be worshipped. Now, this idea was, of course, bitterly opposed, and it aroused so much strife in the Church that Constantine called the first General Council to pronounce upon the question at issue. The Council met at Nicæa in Bithynia, in the year A.D. 325, and was asked to decide once for all what should be the belief of Christians concerning Jesus Christ and His relation to God. The great opponent of Arius was Athanasius, a man mighty in controversy, but of no great standing in the Church of the day. In office he was simply a deacon, but his

intellectual superiority made him the protagonist on the orthodox side. Gradually the controversy came to centre round the famous word "Ousia," or Essence. The main point at issue was this: Was Jesus Christ to be called "Of like essence with God," that is, "Homoiousios," or was He to be called "Of the same essence with God—Homousios"? Are we to say that Jesus was only like God in the sense that perhaps all human nature is made in His image, or are we to say that Jesus Christ is of the very essence of God? The majority of the Council was, at first, in favour of finding some *via media*. Led by Eusebius of Cæsarea, they would have been perfectly ready to take a middle course between the Arian and Athanasian positions, and come to a compromise, but, as the Emperor decreed that they must take a firm line, they decided for Athanasius and his position, and the word went forth that Jesus Christ was of the very essence of

God.¹ Arius and his friends for the time being were banished, and the controversy ended in the establishment and acceptance of that ancient symbol which we call the Nicene Creed, and which was given its full form at the Council at Constantinople some fifty years afterwards. In this symbol the statements concerning Jesus Christ are of the most explicit character possible, and read as follows :

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made, Who for us men and

¹ "The Christian doctrine of the Person of Christ can be stated simply enough—that He is as divine as the Father and as human as ourselves. This is the sum total of Christian orthodoxy on the matter, and any one who means this means all that Athanasius ever meant. The technicalities of the creeds add nothing to it, and were only meant (and needed) to prevent officials of the Church from saying it, like Arius and many of the moderns, in some evasive sense which entirely changes its meaning."—Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, vol. ii. p. 112.

for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, And was made man, And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead : Whose kingdom shall have no end.

There is one difference at least between this Creed and the Creed called the Apostles'. Here is a comparatively long, philosophical and somewhat elaborate statement preceding the historical statement. This Jesus is "The only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father," and so on. This is an addendum, so to speak, to the story of the Jesus of history. But explicit as it is it still leaves much to be desired. It left open

the question as to the precise relation of the human and divine in the Person of Jesus Christ. The prevalence of various speculations on the subject gave rise to the following definite pronouncement by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 :

Following the holy Fathers, we confess and all with one consent teach one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood : truly God and truly man ; the same consisting of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood ; in all things like unto us without sin : begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the manhood : one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably : the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but

rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one, the same Son and only-begotten God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him.

The next stage in this process of elaboration is marked by the rise of the so-called Athanasian Creed or *Quicumque vult*. This gave a final form to the Chalcedonian Christology.

It arose in South Gaul or in Spain, not earlier than the fifth century and possibly a century later, and it became the stereotyped form of the Christology of the Christian Church. It remains embodied in the English Prayer-book at the present day, and it is to be taken as the last word, the high-water mark of ancient philosophical speculation on the Person of Jesus Christ. The following passages from the Creed will serve to indicate the point to which we have attained.

Whosoever will be saved before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick Faith.

Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholick faith is this : That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity ;

Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

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Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man ;

God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds ; and Man, of the Substance of His mother, born in the world ;

Perfect God and perfect Man ; of a

reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting ;

Equal to the Fathèr, as touching His Godhead ; and inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood.

Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.

And of this God and Man it is said in another place :

The Father [is] eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three eternal ; but One Eternal ;

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated ; but One Uncreated and One Incomprehensible.

In these words we have the final form of this attempt to express Jesus Christ in terms of human philosophy ; and it will be generally agreed that they represent a very marked advance on the language of the New Testament and on this first Christian Creed : “ I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

The question for us at the present time, and indeed for the whole Christian Church of to-day, is as to the right intellectual attitude to assume towards these Christian Creeds. How far can we be expected to accept them, and how far is it true still that "Whosoever shall not accept these things shall without doubt perish everlastingly" ?

First of all, it must be remembered that we have in the Creeds the result of the natural development of the thought of the Christian Church. The great datum of Christianity is the Person of Jesus Christ, that Person who is set before us in the Gospels, and who is a legitimate subject for our study and reflection. There are those who would have us turn altogether away from anything that is in the nature of dogmatic Christianity; but we cannot do it. So long as men have minds they will reflect, and so long as they try to reflect upon Christian truth as given to them they must frame doctrine. We need not, of course, impose our doctrine upon any one

else ; we have no right to do it. But in order to make doctrine we must think, and we must use the intellectual power we possess and the forms of thought peculiar to our day. The process of the formation of Christian doctrine followed a perfectly natural and well-defined course. There is given the Person of Jesus Christ appearing in history amid certain intellectual conditions that have to be taken into account. At first these are Jewish. Next the Christian idea is brought into contact with men whose minds were steeped in Greek philosophy and familiar with the method of the philosophical schools. It was an accepted idea that each one of these schools had its own formulas, and that every member of the school must accept the formulas. Thus it is easily understood how the Christian Church became to some people mainly an intellectual school, and therefore must have its formulas, and that its formulas must be accepted by those who belonged to it. So there grows up the idea that if a man does not accept

the formulas he will be cut off from the society, and will without doubt perish everlastingly. But that is not a strictly Christian idea. It belongs to the philosophical thought and practice of the moment, and has in it little or nothing that belongs to revealed Christianity.

There follows from this the further idea that it is necessary, in order to defend the faith, to make a perfectly clear and explicit statement in regard to the objects of the faith. This is a process that is carried on every day in all departments of human thought. The moment any truth is arrived at, the mind of man necessarily demands that that truth shall be stated in terms as explicit as possible; and it is most interesting in the study of history to discover how slowly and with what pain and effort men have sought to beat out for themselves some definite statement in regard to the great and perplexing truths concerning God and His Christ.

Probably no doubt was ever entertained

by any save the very greatest of those who took part in these ancient controversies as to the possibility of putting into adequate words the great spiritual and metaphysical ideas with which they had to deal. But we have come to realise more generally that in Jesus Christ, and in the Scripture statements concerning Jesus Christ, there are truths adumbrated which are not to be put into words. No words that the human mind can invent are sufficient to express the full meaning of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and we now understand that not even the development of religious thought has yet come to an end. We cannot believe that the fullest possible expression of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus was reached in the fourth century or in the fifth century, or will be reached in this twentieth century to which we belong. The work of Christ is final, but our conception of it grows. We have to try and understand that in Christ there is a great and constantly advancing truth set before the

mind of man, that each age has to adapt itself to it and express it in its own way and in its own terms ; and that we have no right to bind ourselves to the form of expression current in any particular period of the history of the Christian Church. Rather it is obligatory on us to go behind all the creeds and to discover what they said and meant for the time in which and for which they were formulated, in order that we may be the better able to make a creed for our own time, and the better able to express the truth as it is in Christ Jesus for our own day and for our own lives. The symbol of Nicæa and the symbol of Athanasius were both of them useful and necessary in their own day. They helped, in the providence of God, to preserve Christian truth inviolable when the great collapse of the Roman Empire came. They stereotyped and hardened the truth into exact formulas, so that men were able to receive and hand it on in such a way as to keep them true to the great central Christian position, the position

that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. These ancient forms conserved the truths they contained, but, having done their work, they are largely dead or may be suffered to die. To-day these creeds are as a millstone round the neck of many a Christian. Men have to struggle and submit to evasions and reservations in order to accept them, and when they are made part of the door, so to speak, into the Christian Church and to Christian office, they are surely turned to an unspiritual use, and are made the means of stultifying the whole intellectual position of those who so use them. They are interesting historical monuments. They did their work and they have had their day; but they are not to be bound on tender consciences in this time or in any time. Any creed which a body of Christians may formulate, any creed which the Christian Church may make at the present time can and must only be declaratory, setting forth the view of the Church for the time being, and ought not to be made an imposition upon any.

The question still remains as to what relation these formulas bear to the Person of Jesus Christ as we know it in the Gospels. All that can be required of Christian men at the present time is an answer to the question, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" Every man should be allowed to express that belief in his own terms. As Dr. Denney has recently shown it might be possible and is surely desirable to reduce all the creeds of Christendom to this very simple form: "I believe in God through Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord and Saviour." That is all that is really needed; for it should be remembered that belief in Jesus Christ is not the acceptance of intellectual propositions concerning Jesus Christ.¹ Belief in Jesus Christ is the acceptance in actual fact and experience of Jesus Christ on His own terms. The man who really believes is the man who in his own heart says to Jesus

¹ Cf. Burn, *On the Creeds*, p. 6. "Christian metaphysic is no more an end in itself than the analysis of good drinking-water. By itself it leaves us thirsty."

Christ, "My Lord and Saviour," who acts upon that principle, who makes Christ his Leader and his Lord, who lives in and unto Him, who seeks His ends and pursues His will. That is the man who believes, and not the man who can say merely that He is Very God of very God, that He is eternal, co-eternal with the Father, that He is of the same substance with the Father. With those who like to pursue matters of that intellectual and philosophical nature, these are probably the conclusions which they will reach; but the real essence of the matter is to take up that attitude of soul towards Jesus Christ that makes Him central to faith; and so long as that is done, so long as men bow before Him as their Lord and Master and live their lives in and unto Him, He is to them all that He can ever be, and they are Christians in deed and in truth.¹

¹ Cf. Harnack: *History of Dogma*, vol. i. p. 133. "Behind and in the Gospel stands the Person of Jesus Christ, who mastered men's hearts and constrained them to yield themselves to Him as His own, and in whom they found their God. Theology attempted to describe in a

Now, the sense of this has never been lost at any period in the Christian Church. Both in the early Church and in the Middle Ages there were hymns and other writings which show that Jesus Christ was present to men's minds in other than the merely intellectual form, and that they had a warmer and deeper relationship with Him. Among these is a famous hymn attributed to St. Patrick, which may be dated about the middle of the fifth century, and which contains these words—and it is words like these, rather than those abstract philosophical statements, which express the real attitude of the Christian Church and Christian souls towards Jesus Christ, their Lord and their God.

Christ with me, Christ before me,
 Christ behind me, Christ within me,
 Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
 Christ on my right, Christ on my left,

very uncertain and feeble outline what the mind and heart had grasped. Yet it testifies of a new life which, like all higher life, was kindled by a Person, and could only be maintained by connection with that Person."

Christ in the fort, Christ on the chariot seat,
Christ in the poop,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of
me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of
me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHRIST OF THE REFORMATION

CHAPTER VII

THE CHRIST OF THE REFORMATION

Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.—ROM. v. 1, 2.

WE have traced the process by which the doctrine of Jesus Christ grew throughout the history of the early Church. We have seen it passing through various phases in New Testament and apostolic times, and under various influences consolidating into fixed dogmatic form in the fourth and fifth centuries. The process has been really one of development. There has been at the centre, and as the source of it, the living Person of Jesus Christ, having within the power of growth and adaptation. In the same way, man's thought about the

person of Jesus Christ, working in experience and influenced by outside conditions, has grown like a really living thing. We have seen the way in which Hebrew law, Greek philosophy, and Roman imperialism have all in their turn been brought to bear upon this organism, and have profoundly influenced it and conditioned its growth; and we have seen also, in the process of beating out the truth as it is in Jesus, how various errors have crept in from time to time, and have had their part to play, each, as it were, contributing its quota to the better expression of the truth.

We have now come to a time when truth is for the Church practically fixed. Doctrine has become dogma, and it may be said with authority not only that such and such things are believed by Christians, but that unless men and women believe such and such things they cannot be reckoned as Christians. In the various creeds there was set out in clear, unmistakable form, the whole Catholic faith, which, unless a man

believed he would without doubt perish everlastingly. That is, so to speak, the culmination of the process. There the finished product stands before us. There is the doctrine of Jesus Christ set forth once and for all authoritatively, and that is what the Church must receive. The new point which emerges in the fifth century is the insistence on the fact that one particular form of doctrine—three Persons in one Godhead, two Natures in one Person, and the like—is absolutely necessary to salvation.

Now, the result of this upon the minds of Christians, and upon the lives of Christians, was far-reaching and almost immeasurable. This fixing of doctrine into dogma led in the first instance to a serious separation between Christian thought and Christian life. It resulted in the second place in dividing man from God by a wider gulf than had almost ever been felt before. Men and women were educated in the belief that in order to be saved, in order to know God, in order to live a Christian life, they must

think those thoughts that the old Fathers thought ; they must take up this particular intellectual position, and must fit themselves with these intellectual garments. They found the task very difficult. Most of those who ever thought at all about Christian subjects were quite probably unable to grasp the meaning of the dogmatic position as a whole. The matter was left to the select few ; the Church became the depository of truth ; the priest became the holder of the conscience of man ; and so long as men and women were able to relate themselves with some sort of success to the Church it was understood that they need not trouble very much about their own doctrinal position. Let them assert in words, let them take for granted that what the Church said was true, and all would be well. In consequence, the relation between Christian truth and Christian life became very slight. It was not necessary to be a good man or a good woman in order to be a Christian of the older orthodoxy. It has

to be admitted that wherever a Church is found to insist upon a strict standard of orthodoxy there is at least the danger of a low standard of morals. History supplies abundant evidence of the fact. So long as men imagine that they can be saved by right thinking they will pay little or no attention to right doing. The relation between creed and conduct is not always that of a natural sequitur.

Then, on the other hand, this position led to a real separation between God and man. When men are told that what is most needful to know of God is to be found in such formulas as the Athanasian Creed, certain results follow. They feel that God has become a kind of metaphysical entity of which they can really know nothing. They feel that the whole atmosphere of religion has become to them a mist of puzzle and perplexity. We have only to read a little way into the literature of the Middle Ages to find out that such ideas were very prevalent. God was far away ; He was a great

riddle which no man could read, the secret of which only a few could understand. All that the common folk could do was to feel that here were mysteries and perplexities utterly beyond them, and that they were at the mercy of any who professed to interpret them. It is curious to discover how in the Middle Ages the great Christian teachers and leaders, the men who carried on theological controversies, and tried to puzzle out for themselves the meaning of the old formulas—how these men stood apart from the really vital Christian movements of the time. The schoolmen spoke, if they spoke at all, in the utmost scorn of such a movement as that of St. Francis. They feel that such efforts of men and women for a better life have nothing to do with the issues that concern them. Their business is with the metaphysical side of things, and unless they are able to bring some new light to bear there, they do not seem to be really facing the Christian problem at all. It was left to the mystics to give

expression to the relation between Christian truth and practice; and even these help us to understand how hard it is for men whose Christianity takes only a speculative form to grasp experimentally the truth of the teaching and work and redemption of God in Jesus Christ.

Then there came a change. The Reformation, as we now call it, was an event which had a great many roots. It was in a sense the child of the Renaissance. It was brought about, on one side at least, by the immense intellectual awakening and the revival of learning and letters due to the study of the old classics, and the recovery of the ancient languages in which the Scriptures are written. But there was more in it than that. Those who have studied the literature of the time cannot fail to notice that there was in those days the surging and stirring of a new life under the hard formalism and dogmatism of the Catholic Church. It is to be seen in the ready welcome that Luther met with. It

is to be seen in the intellectual keenness and spiritual fervour of Calvin and the men he gathered round him. It may be discovered even in the writings of many of the humanists of the day. There was everywhere a divine discontent, a quickening of the human spirit, a softening of the human heart, an opening of the long-shut eyes to the sense that men must get near to God, and get near to Him by whatever means they could. These two forces, the literary and the spiritual, if it may so be called, met at the Reformation. The leading Reformers were all orthodox men. It is most interesting and curious to discover how eager they are to declare to the world that they are orthodox; how Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin, one after the other, profess that they are quite willing to accept the old statements of Christian truth. They mention by name especially the Athanasian Creed. Luther put the Apostles' Creed into the very foundation of his catechism, and declared over and over again that he held

by what was there set forth. But he held by it with a difference. What he sought and found was not the position of the schoolmen. His intellectual attitude was not that of a hard dogmatism, or a merely formal acceptance of the truth ; it was a living and experimental interpretation of the truth by the man's own heart and life and conscience. The Reformers were pioneers. They found the truth as it was in Jesus for themselves, and did not simply receive it from any of the men that came before them ; and for that reason they were reformers and not schoolmen, prophets rather than scribes.

These facts found expression for themselves in various ways. Although the Reformers were very eager to accept the orthodoxy of their day, they were very jealous, and very cautious about using the current terminology. Luther says on more than one occasion that he does not like the term "Trinity." There is "something not quite German about it." He means that

it is not sufficiently homely and intelligible. He would like some better word. He does not, again, like to talk much about Person and Substance, and the possibility of two Persons in one. These are things he believes in, but it is better not to say much about them. Even Calvin takes a similar position. Speaking of the terms Person and Substance as applied to Jesus Christ, he says: "I could wish them, indeed, to be buried in oblivion, provided this faith were universally received that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God, and that, nevertheless, the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit. They are distinguished from each other by some peculiar property." Calvin was struggling for a more sane, liberal, and intelligent interpretation of this mystery of the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Reformers arrived at this in three different ways. First, they insisted, as the schoolmen had never done, upon the real humanity of Jesus Christ. Some of the brightest and most beautiful of Luther's

writing is concerned with the human life of Jesus. He speaks of Him as a little child, a babe in his mother's arms, as the growing boy about the house, running to fetch for his mother the water from the well, or the wood from the heap ; he speaks of Him as gathering strength until He is able to enter His father's workshop, and use the tools alongside him, and he says that men must think of Him as in these ways one of themselves. Luther, no doubt, thought of Him as a little German boy in a German home ; but he was none the worse for it, and he insisted, with all the bright, sunny *bonhomie* of the man, that this Jesus Christ, if He were to help, or if He were to be the least use to us, must be regarded as a Man amongst men, lovely in His life, holy and sinless as no man ever was, but still a Man. He is not a phantom of the imagination, still less an entity or quiddity of metaphysics, but a living Man among men. He is One into whose presence we can enter, One who bore our

infirmities, who was tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

It is not easy to overestimate the importance of this position. It was this sense of the humanity of Jesus Christ which delivered the Reformers from the drear and arid formalism of the past. May we not say that it is this sense of the full humanity of Jesus Christ that is so much needed in the Christian thought even of to-day? The moment Jesus Christ is turned into a philosophical conception, the moment men feel that the essential thing about an understanding of Him is to be able, as it were, to posit Him in the Godhead, that moment touch with Him is loosened, and His effect upon the heart becomes less. To Luther it was a great thing that Jesus Christ was tempted. As he says in some of his quaint self-revelations, it was this more than anything else that had helped him to endure his own temptation. The same thing has been felt by many since Luther's day, who have found comfort in the fact that

He was tempted like as we are, and yet without sin. In the sorrows and troubles of life, in their weary, dull toil, men have found great help and strength in the thought that this was the way the Master trod, that He knows it, that He understands it, that He has been through it all before. When Luther insisted in ways that sometimes were rather crude and vulgar, that Christians must begin with the humanity of Jesus, and allow nothing to obscure it, he was right. He was laying the foundation for all that saner and lovelier devotion to Christ which came after the Reformation days. No doubt, he was building better than he knew. He was taking Christian people back to history, and helping them to understand that their religion was not simply a question for the philosopher, or for the theologian, but that it was a matter of historical fact. We shall have more to say about this later on, but the importance of it must not be overlooked. It is too often forgotten to-day that once

we root up Christianity out of history we have rooted it up altogether. We may sift the source of the mystery, we may criticise the historical materials available, but we must understand that we have to go back to the Person of Jesus, and take our stand there from the first. Luther understood that this was so. He had no knowledge of our modern historical criticism, and he had very little knowledge of philosophy; but the rough, keen instinct of the man took him back to that point, and made him find the foundation of his faith in the fact of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of man.

But the Reformers approached Jesus Christ not only in this way, from the side of history, but from the side of their own experience. One of their great principles is that knowledge of Christ is direct and personal. So Jesus Christ was to them first of all, not as he was to the schoolmen, the second Person in the Trinity, but the Saviour from sin. Very much depends on

the angle or point of view from which men look up to Jesus Christ. The man who always looks at Him simply from the intellectual standpoint, anxious only to give Him His right position in the Godhead, may be very orthodox, but it will not necessarily follow that he knows very much of Jesus Christ. But the man who looks at Him from the standpoint of his own sinful nature and his own heart's needs and his own spiritual life and progress, and seeks to relate Him first not so much to God as to man, that is the man who knows something of Jesus Christ. It is good to read the way in which some of these old Reformers described the new light, the amazing and intolerable light that came to them when they learned to look at Jesus Christ from the standpoint of their sin and their needs. It is a matter of common knowledge how in Luther's experience the experience of the Apostle Paul was almost repeated in the strangest and most effective fashion. He, like the Apostle, had been living the life

of the law, had been trying to win favour with God by doing things, had been trying to make himself a clean and honest man by his own efforts, and had failed. He was utterly miserable, because of his failures; and—as Paul was too—perhaps Luther was miserable because of the failure of the whole Church and the people round about him. He tells us how his desire is to do anything and everything that this Christ requires. Under the impulse of it he takes his journey up to Rome that he may obtain whatever merit the pilgrimage may bring. He tells us with what feelings he faced the Eternal City, and journeyed on the road trodden by all the pilgrims of the past. In order, as he says, to leave no stone unturned, and to do whatever a man might, he began to crawl on his hands and knees up that sacred Santa Scala staircase, in the vain hope that he might win peace and freedom from purgatory. It was as he was creeping up that a voice came to him: “The just shall live by faith.” And he felt in a moment

what a fool he had been. He realised how it was not penance or pilgrimage or anything that he could do that would bring him nearer to Jesus Christ. What he needed was not what he was doing, but what Christ had done. From that moment, just as from the moment when the Apostle Paul saw a light on the road to Damascus, his whole horizon changed. Life became a new thing to him, and he understood that his business henceforth was simply to accept in gratitude the grace and pity of God, and not to go on striving to work out his own salvation and so attempt an impossible task. Thus the essence of the work of Jesus Christ came for Luther to be the fact that in Him God was giving Himself to and for men, and that in Him there was no longer any condemnation for sin, but an utter and absolute expression of the love of God. As he puts it, using the Apostle Paul's words, he was justified by faith. And for that reason the word justification became the great keyword of the Reformation. It helped men to

see, as Luther and Calvin, Melanchthon and Zwingli all saw, that God was dealing with men, not in virtue of what they were, and not in virtue of what they could do, but in virtue of what they were in Christ. God regarded men in the light of the possibility and the hope that was in them, through that which Christ had come to do for, in, and by them. In this way salvation became a possible thing, not to be won, but to be received freely, without money and without price. Faith to Luther became, thus, not belief in the second Person in the Trinity, nor belief in a creed of any description, but trusting in Christ, taking Christ at His word ; and when faith becomes that for a man he knows something of what both justification and salvation may mean. To quote Melanchthon's great saying : " *Christum cognoscere est beneficia ejus cognoscere, non naturas ejus, modos incarnationis contueri.*"

Once more, the Reformers approached the question of the Person of Christ, and the relation of Jesus Christ to the Godhead, not,

as the schoolmen did, from the standpoint of God first, but from the standpoint of Jesus first. The problem of the theologians had been how, given God, to relate Jesus Christ His Son to Him. The problem for Luther and the Reformers generally was how, given Jesus Christ, to conceive God through Him. The difference here is all-important. It amounts to the difference between theology and experience. The Reformers start with Jesus Christ. He is their datum and the foundation of their system. They begin with the history of Jesus Christ, His Person, His teaching, and His work. In this they see His divine grace manifested in the lives of men and women. It is an expression of God in human terms. We might apply to Luther that most modern word of the theologians, that Jesus Christ had for him the religious value of God. He only saw God as He was in Jesus Christ. His theology, in other words, was a Christology; his theology was Christo-centric in a very real sense, and it was that which made

the distinctive note of the Reformation. From that time until now the corner-stone of the Christian faith has been the conception men have formed of Christ and His work in relation not merely to God but to mankind. If men are to be Christians they must make Christ their interpreter both of God and of man. They must see God in Christ; for, when it comes to the point, what do they know of God save through Jesus Christ? No doubt they have the revelation that came through Moses and through the prophets, through Mohammed and Buddha and the great religions of the East. There is very much to be learned about man's thought of God from all these sources, and in all these ways it is good to learn. But, after all, there is no word, there or anywhere, so direct, so absolute, so final as the word that came in the fullness of the times through His Son. We have not advanced beyond that yet. The Reformers felt that they were almost on dangerous ground in suggesting such a possibility,

and they tried to prove that there was nothing in the new learning of their day that could serve as a substitute for the truth as it is in Jesus. So, amid the myriad voices of our own day the word of God in Jesus Christ still makes its appeal to the human heart. Ultimately, and in its relation to life, that word is ethical, and goodness and holiness are the same all the world over. The universality of Jesus Christ is seen in the fact that He deals with that which is fundamental in human nature, and that He can appeal to men of every class and kind. So long as we begin with Jesus Christ and lead up from Him to God, we are in a position that no advance of human thought, however much it may modify our outlook, standpoint, and conceptions, will be able to disturb. There are some characteristic words of Luther's which are wonderfully true still, and give the central position which he occupied in regard to Jesus Christ. "To know Jesus," he says, "in the true way means to know that He died

for us. There are many of you who say, 'Christ is a Man of this kind: He is God's Son, was born of a pure virgin, became man, died, rose again from the dead,' and so forth: that is all nothing. But when we truly say that He is Christ, we mean that He was given for us, without any works of ours; that without any merits of ours He has won for us the Spirit of God, and has made us children of God, so that we might have a gracious God, might with Him become lords over all things in heaven and on earth, and, besides, might have eternal life through Christ—that is faith, and that is true knowledge of Christ." In other words, Luther's religion must be distinguished from his theology. It was rooted in experience, and his knowledge of God in Christ so attained was surer and more vital than any that men could obtain by hearsay or intellectual effort.

The consequence of all this was a very great change in the whole outlook and standpoint of the Christian Church. This

new conception of Christ and of God in Christ, and the sense that Christ was to be known mainly through the experience of His work in the human heart altered the whole face of Christianity. The gulf between God and man was bridged. The old puzzle in regard to the Godhead ceased to be a puzzle, or at any rate ceased to be pressing. The priest, who had had so much power as long as dogma reigned, became an impertinence, and the old system of approach to God, the saints, and the indulgences, and all the paraphernalia of dogmatism—because these two things, dogma and priestcraft, are intimately related—became as rubbish and had to be cast away. Thus there sprang up in the Church a living faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of man, the Inspirer of the human soul, the Source of grace, and righteousness, and hope, that made grim, strong men, made heroes, martyrs, and saints, and stirred like a ferment the whole of Protestant Europe. This new faith became the main-spring of all our modern life, and it is not

dead yet. Out of all the trouble and distress in the Christian Church of to-day, out of the theological turmoil which bulks so largely in the minds of many people good will come if and as the Christian Church remains true to that central position, the experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and devotion to the Person of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of man, Saviour of the world.

CHAPTER VIII
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Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, yea, and for ever.—HEB. xiii. 8.

WE have been studying the various aspects under which Jesus Christ has been manifested to men in different ages since His coming into the world. We have examined some of His interpreters and the methods of their interpretation, and we have now, if possible, to complete the process. In all this investigation it should have become clear that we have been dealing throughout with the same Christ. We have seen Him manifesting Himself, or being manifested, in very many different forms. He appears in one form to the Jew, in another to the Greek; in one form to the Church of the first century, and in another

to the Church of the fourth century; but in all the forms it is the same Christ who appears. When, therefore, we speak of the Christ of any age, or any time, or of any section of the Christian Church, we do not mean that we divide the body of Christ, or that we split up the personality of Christ; we only mean that His appeal to man and to the human consciousness is so varied that no two persons ever see Him quite in the same way. Men and communities alike approach Him, as it were, from different points of view. Each of us has his own point of view, and therefore every man and every age has his or its Christ.

Our object at the present time is to try and discover what is the appeal of Jesus Christ to this present age. It is not that we worship a different Christ from the Christ of the first century, or of the fourth century, or of the Reformation time, but that this same Christ appeals to us to-day as He appealed to the men of those ages in the past, and that His appeal to us is special, peculiar to our

need and to our time, one that only we can listen to, and one that only we can understand and appreciate. The supreme task of the Christian Church in these days is, so to speak, to rediscover Jesus Christ for herself. And in the same way the supreme task of the individual Christian is to listen to the word which Jesus Christ speaks, and speaks to him. Only, it is necessary that we should understand, as did the first followers of Jesus, that His activity is not over. He ever liveth, and as long as He lives He speaks. What His message is we as Christians have to inquire.

The question is undoubtedly a difficult one. We have already seen some of the reasons for the difficulty of it, and we have to add to them this special difficulty, that we are living in a time when historical criticism has been applied to the story of Jesus Christ in the most searching and complete fashion. The consequence is that there are many who are inclined to assume that we have only the shreds and patches of a

Christ left, that at the very best we know next to nothing about Him and can say very little with any sort of certainty about His person or His teaching. It has to be admitted that there is a certain truth in this. We can no longer go back, as our fathers went back, to certain proof-texts in regard to Jesus Christ and believe implicitly what they assert. It is impossible any longer to use the Scriptures quite as they used them. It is impossible any longer to be absolutely sure in regard to certain points in the teaching of Jesus Christ that they are really His. But when all that has been admitted there is at least this left, that, taking the very minimum which historical criticism will allow us, we still have remaining the Person of Jesus Christ, and we still have ground for the conclusion that that Person is the supreme Person in human history as we know it. There is a fact of Christ which remains amid all the many interpretations given of it.

That is, no doubt, a great deal to say.

But it is not easy to see how any man can honestly investigate the Synoptic Gospels and the history of the early Christian teaching and come to any other conclusion than that while here and there he has to strip off certain details of which he cannot be sure, when he has stripped them off the personality of Jesus remains ; and it is that with which we are concerned. When criticism has done its worst there is left this potent force, the Person of Jesus Christ, a Man, who was as no man has ever been, before or since ; and there is also left the effect, the work of this Person in human history. No philosophy of history will allow us to confine this Person to the thirty odd years He lived on earth. We would not do so with any other person in history. If we would study Napoleon and all that Napoleon stands for, we must take into account his history and influence from the day when he was born to the present hour. And if that is so with this mere man, how much more so with the Christ ? To know Him it is necessary

to study the whole of His influence in human history from the hour He entered into the world. We begin with the Person of Jesus Christ, that potent personality which has made itself felt in many human lives, and we have to ask as to what He stands for and how He appeals to the man of to-day.

First, then, we must realise that Jesus Christ is still, as He was to the men who first knew Him and to the men of the Reformation, a living Person. It is necessary in these days to lay some stress upon the fact that Jesus Christ is a living force and available for human needs. The late Dr. Dale tells how, once meditating an Easter sermon in his study, he was walking up and down when there suddenly flashed across his mind the conviction that Jesus Christ was alive. This conviction, he said, altered his whole horizon and changed the character of his preaching from that time onwards. It is some such experience as this that the Christian Church needs to go through. There has been one evil result of recent

historical criticism of the Gospels. Men have too often come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is some Person buried away in the infinitely distant past, and that they have to go back and grope for Him there if they would discover Him at all. Now, that is not so.

The real cry of the Christian Church is not "Back to Jesus Christ." It is no question of going back. The real cry is, "Sirs, we would see Jesus, and see Him now, and hear Him speak in the language of to-day." And the real need of the Church and of the world to-day is to come into touch with what is called sometimes the living Christ. The Christ of to-day must be One who has become part and parcel of our human environment, who is still a force, the effect of which we can feel for ourselves—a Christ who is for us not merely a memory, not merely a sacred figure with a halo round it that we can bow down before in reverence, but a power that touches us, and that we can touch,

and of which we can have real and experimental knowledge. The world as well as the Church needs that, because the real trouble about this modern age of ours is its curious limitation. The sense of horizon has almost passed out of human life. Most men and women are living very hurriedly for the present; the future has but little concern for them. They need, above everything else, to get back the old sense of the seers, of the men who looked beyond, the sense which Tennyson felt so keenly when he said: "The far future is my world always." No human life that is worth living can be lived on the basis of the present alone. It is not a question of rewards or punishments merely, or of what is to come after death; it is a question of perspective. Life with nine-tenths of the men and women around us to-day is like one of those Chinese pictures that have no perspective, a queer, twisted, huddled, maimed, and monstrous thing. They need to get back to the standpoint of the Christ

who saw things *sub specie eternitatis*—in the form and in the light of eternity. That is life, and apart from that there is no life worth the name. The word of Christ to the world to-day, as it has been so often in the past, is just the great word “Life.” It is life, more life and fuller, that we want; and the prerogative and glory of the Christ is that He has been able to give this life to men and women. They have found in Him a life more abundant, that has the power to lift poor human creatures out of the gutter and set them by the side of kings, has pointed out to men and women a vast and infinite horizon, and has set the stamp of His glory on some of the lowliest of human foreheads. That is what the world to-day needs. As we look round on this human society in the midst of which we live, what a spectacle it presents. The men and women here struggle on this little globe, like ants on an ant-hill. Life is full of competition and strife, of passion, and greed for wealth, and the eagerness

of new discovery. There are whole classes of people to whom life is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. They have pleasures, but no deep and solid joys. They have a future, but no outlook, and their present life is but a barren waste. If this condition is to be altered it will only be by taking into account that larger aspect of things for which Christ stands, and by putting eternity into their hearts. In His power to accomplish this for those who know Him, Jesus Christ is the same to-day as He was yesterday, and is for ever.

But it is not only in this sense that Jesus Christ appeals especially to the men of to-day. He appeals also, as He has always done, from the ethical standpoint. The power of Christ in this, as in every age, is due to the effect of His Gospel on the development of human character. Character is the real end of all our achievement and discipline, and a man without character is a man who becomes a negligible quantity. It is no exaggeration to say that the great

purpose of Jesus Christ was to produce in men this invaluable asset of character, and His best appeal and His most needed word to the men of to-day is when His Gospel, His message, is cast in this ethical form. It is not difficult to understand how it is chiefly on this ethical side that the message of Jesus Christ appeals. Take, for instance, one of the familiar phrases regarding His Spirit in the New Testament. He comes "to convince the world of sin." The message of Jesus Christ to this present age can be conveyed in no better term than that. If He has anything at all to say to this age, it is to convince it of sin; and the reason why we say that is, that this age wants to be convinced of sin perhaps less than any other in the past. The famous saying of Anselm, "Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum," is strictly applicable to the present time. The most deadly diseases are those which conceal themselves from the sufferer till it is too late to effect a cure. Sin has this

quality of concealment; and the power of the Gospel comes from the fact that it can diagnose and discover the disease. The question must be asked therefore: What is it that is making people in these days so shy of sin? And the answer is to be found in that shallowness of outlook and that effort to be satisfied with the present of which we have been speaking. We are told we must adapt our message to the age. No doubt the message needs to be cast in the language that the age can understand; but it does not follow at all that the message will be the one that the age wishes to hear. It should be the one that the age needs to hear; and the measure of the lack of appreciation of the sense of sin in any age or in any man is the measure of his need for the Gospel, which will convince him of sin, and drive him to that point whither he is so reluctant to go. The Lord Jesus Christ comes to do that still. This is sometimes called the old-fashioned Gospel, as though it were

out of date. It is true that it can no longer be preached quite in the terms that were current in earlier days ; but in essence the message of Jesus Christ to the world is still one of repentance and remission of sins. That is to say, His message is cast in ethical terms. There is no reason to be afraid of this, and still less reason to repudiate what is sometimes called an Ethical Gospel. We must learn to express salvation in terms of character. Now, to the man who says that he is perfect, that all is right with him, and that he does not need anything, and is happy enough as he is, we have no ground of ethical appeal. The only chance of discovering character in a man is to make him feel how low down he is, and what a great height he has to climb. That is the sense of sin. There is little or no prospect of moral advance in a man who says he is perfectly right with God, that he has no need for anxiety about his relations with God. He is among the righteous who need no repentance. But

for the man who prostrates himself before his God, crying "Unclean," there is a chance, and that man has the beginnings in him of the highest devotion and purest life. It is this work that Jesus Christ comes to do; and if the preaching of the present day is to take any real hold, it must be preaching which will convince men of sin, and will tell comfortable, respectable people what a long road they have to travel before they can be even what they seem. Our Lord's parable of the cup and the platter is strictly applicable to the circumstances of to-day. Men need to strip off the specious outward appearance and see themselves as they really are. There is a self-revelation that is like the turning up of some stone that has long lain on the ground. To move it is to discover the creeping, noisome things that had gathered there. And that is what Christ does for men. To change the image, He holds up to them the mirror of His purity, and the most outwardly dignified of

men can see then what manner of man he is. The discipline is one that is really needed to-day. Many of us are deceived, and living in a fool's paradise. We think ourselves better than we really are, and measuring ourselves among ourselves, we are not wise. The Christ of to-day comes again as He came of old, on the same business, and men still say: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Sometimes the best day ever a man had is when he has learned to say that, because there is the beginning of the new life and of the higher ideals and of the nobler character which Christ can bring.

Then there is one other direction in which the teaching of Christ is especially applicable to the present time, and that is in regard to all those matters which we are accustomed to sum up under the wide term social. This is an age when the social side of human life has come to the front as perhaps never in the past. The familiar expression, "We are all socialists

now," has very considerable truth behind it. We are all learning to look at things from the social point of view. We have to learn the lesson of the solidarity of the human race and of society. Everything is now seen from the standpoint of society; and the problem that faces the most thoughtful people at the present time is the social problem—the problem of what is to become of men and women in this complex and fearful machine we call modern society. Now, Jesus Christ has a special message on those lines to this present age; and the solution of these problems that vex us so much and on which we spend so many hours of study, is not likely to be found along any other road than the road of Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Saviour of the world. And it will come about in two ways. First there must be the discovery that underneath what is called the social problem there is a moral and spiritual problem. That is the point that Jesus Christ insists upon. Men come to Him

maimed, palsied, and helpless human beings, and He says to them all, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." That comes first. And our social reformers must learn to take things in their proper order. Many of them by this time are tired of tinkering with the outside. Those who have ever tried to regenerate a sunken human being, some miserable drunkard or wastrel, know what this means. They put him into a clean house and into clean clothes and give him a fresh job, and they know, to their sorrow, what the end of it is. The work goes on over and over again, until they are sick, and weary, and in despair. What is needed is a new man, as well as a new environment; and the thing Jesus Christ is insisting upon with every one who listens to His word is that we must begin with the new man first, and be radical in our treatment of the problem, if we are to make any change. It is more than merely fanciful to say that the key to the solution of all our social questions is to

be found in that word to which Jesus gives so strange and wonderful a new meaning, that most familiar word "Love." There is much talk to-day about brotherhood, and men imagine that if the brotherhood of mankind could be in some way recognised and acted upon the millennium would come. They are right. It is true enough so long as brotherhood means love. And Christ's message to society is that it is to re-establish itself on a basis of love. It does not need very much acumen to see that if this were done the world would be turned upside down. When men come to reflect upon this, they generally reach the conclusion that to carry it out would mean a revolution. Again they are right. A very little study of history will convince us that Christianity is a great revolutionary force, if it is anything. The Church is afraid of this, and tries to run the teaching of Jesus through little conventional channels of her own; but the time is coming when it will burst these banks; and when once the law of Jesus

Christ is applied to human life the revolution will be at hand. It will be a bloodless one, but it will be very real. It is useless for men to blame Christianity and Christ for the present condition of society. Sometimes the newspapers tell us this, and complain that Christianity has been tried long enough, and is responsible for the social order we see around us. As a matter of fact, Christianity has never been tried. Men have not yet learnt to love their neighbours as themselves, and men of the world would tell us that on that basis business would be impossible. But the concern of Jesus Christ is not that business may be carried on, but that men and women should be sons and daughters of the living God. The message that is being more and more clearly heard by this age, through all its dim social aspirations, is that old message of Jesus Christ, that men and women must learn to love God first, and their neighbour next, with all their heart and strength, and to carry out life on that basis. We shall

come to that some day, and meanwhile the business of every Christian is to start as near to it as he can and do the best he can to bear another's burdens, and so fulfil, each up to his strength, Christ's law.

This is an age which loves what are called facts; and the fact of Jesus Christ, His Person and His teaching, is one that appeals, and is appealing, in spite of all the difficulties caused by our modern temper and ideals. But we are accustomed to verify our facts, and the power and teaching of Jesus Christ need to be verified in the experience of every individual among us. The method of Jesus when He was here on earth was to bind men to Himself by the bonds of a living loyalty, and the method holds good still. Love to Christ, devotion to His Person and to His aims, are still the best means of discovering the truth of His claims, and they are means that are within the reach of every one. Christianity is a system that may be put to the proof, and no man is entitled to

judge it till he has tested it for himself by the methods of observation and experiment. As Seeberg says, "That is the experience of the divinity of Christ. He, and He alone among all the figures and powers of life, constrains us to faith and love. We accept what He says to us, what He gives us, and what He becomes to us, and thereby we are inwardly freed to follow Him, to make His goal ours, to love God and the brethren with holy, eternal love. That He is the Lord, and exercises divine sway over us we experience in faith, and that His goal, or the kingdom of God, is the only really precious good we prove—through His power, and because He actuates us to it—in love. Jesus Christ is holy Spirit. Since He penetrates the heart and subdues us, we become free from the world and from ourselves, and it is then we feel ourselves in the sphere of life upon the heights of our existence." ¹

It is obvious, however, that if Christ is

to appeal to the present age in such fashion as we have indicated, and to do for men that which they most need to have done, He must be approached by them as One who has the necessary authority and power. The sign and title of this they may find not only in the story of Him as told in the New Testament, but in the long history of His influence in the hearts and lives of His followers. He speaks to-day even with an added authority, because signs have followed to confirm the word. In the power of the Word made flesh, and of the Word reincarnated in the lives of men, we find to-day the connecting link between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. As Prof. Percy Gardner has said: "It is a fatal aberration to make the human life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels in any way unreal: we must be content to see in them the memorials of a human life, but without sin, and governed by a unity of will with the divine purposes which makes it quite unique. Yet we in no way transgress the canons of

reason and of history if we connect that life with the outpouring of a fresh tide of spiritual life upon the world, which took form in the perpetuation of the spirit and the obedience of Jesus in the inspiration of the Christian Church. He who came to the earth as Jesus has dwelt there to our day as Christ. The Christian consciousness of our day is one with the consciousness which has set apart the followers of Christ from the world since the day when the apostles first realised that though their Master was hidden from sight he was with them until the end of the world.”¹

¹ *Jesus or Christ*, p. 56.

CONCLUSION

THE CHURCHES AND THE FAITH

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“**H**ISTORY,” it has been said, “is an excellent cordial for drooping courage,” and the memory of the past, with its records of struggle and triumph issuing ever in clearer light and wider knowledge, is the best possible antidote against the panic, unrest, and unbelief which assail too many of us in these days. It is natural that men should feel deeply about those matters which concern their highest interests, and that Churches should resent wanton questioning of the things most surely believed among them. Loyalty to tradition and reverence for the past are good things, but they may be easily abused ; and when they lead to stagnation of thought, and to a wilful blinding of the eyes to the light, the

abuse of them is palpable. The main contribution which the modern spirit has made to the mental outlook and equipment of mankind is to be found in the idea of development. The old Greek conception of an eternal flux of things has now been translated into the wider conception of progress. Life can no longer be regarded as a sea with ebbing and advancing tides, but rather as a river flowing from its source in ever-increasing volume. And this idea of continuous and progressive change holds good not merely of life, but of thought. When we deal with man's thought of God we have to confess, with our hands upon our mouths, that we know only in part and prophesy in part. But we look forward to a state and to a time when that which is in part shall be done away, and towards this we move, not by leaps and bounds, but with the slow and intermittent advance of the waves upon the sea-shore.

In the process of development in the physical world two factors at least have

always to be taken into account. There is the organism with its inherent life-force, and there is the environment which helps or hinders, but always modifies its growth. So in studying the history of man's thought about God we have to distinguish between the original deposit, or gospel or life, and those surroundings, individual or racial, through which, or in spite of which, it makes its slow advance. The process here, as always, is one of stress and struggle. There is nothing to be alarmed at in this. While there is life there will be conflict, and a condition of unrest is always better than one of contentment, stagnation, and death. It is with this unrest that we are now concerned, but only within strict limits. We have to do with the general intellectual advance only at the point where it comes into contact with the Christian Gospel and the Christian Church. We have to ask ourselves as to the relation of Christian Churches, organised on the basis of an earlier world-conception, to those later and

newer conceptions implied in recent intellectual advance. And in doing so we must remember that we are dealing, not with unconscious and incalculable forces, but with a situation in which the human will is among the factors to be taken into account. The question is not merely whether organised Christianity *can* show herself adaptable to the needs of modern time, but whether and how far she will.

We are accustomed to say that Christianity is a revealed religion. But it is an axiom of any doctrine of revelation that God speaks to men in language which they can understand. The Christian revelation has its source and centre in Jesus Christ. He is to men *the* Word of God. But both His speech and person were strictly adapted to the age at which He came into history. He was no superman, but a Jew of Palestine in the first decades of this era. His speech was no Volapük or Esperanto, but the simple Aramaic of His day. But these things are only of the form, not of the essence, of His

revelation. They became the vehicle of abiding and eternal truth. So as Jesus spake to the men of His time in the language and under the forms of their age, His followers for all time have to speak of Him in terms which their contemporaries use and can understand. The varying attempts to do this are what we call the theology of the Christian Church, and according as the attempt succeeds or fails, the theology may be described as alive or dead. The great need of the present time is not a new theology, in the sense of one different from any of those that have been, or a return to one or other of these old theologies, but rather a living theology—one, that is, which gives actual and intelligible expression to the Christian thought and experience of the hour. The present unrest is caused by the clashing of confused efforts to obtain this end in Churches which are mostly organised on the basis of fixed intellectual forms.

Granting, then, for the moment that some adaptation in the intellectual forms of faith

is necessary to meet the demands of the age, the question at once arises as to whether there are any fixed data which will remain unaffected in the process. Here a very clear understanding becomes necessary. The two main foci of Christian thought are the historical Person of Jesus on the one hand, and the experience engendered by faith in Him on the other. These must not be confused, and they must not be separated. We need not be afraid of the appeal to history. The criticism which enables us to go behind our documents in the New Testament has unveiled for us there a portrait of Jesus which is not that of a man like ourselves, but of One who, even for the men of His day, has the religious value of God, and is approached with a faith and reverence greater than men are wont to give to any teacher of religion or to any prophet of the Lord. This historic Divine Person is the ultimate datum of our religion and is that which makes our religion Christian. His consciousness of a unique relationship to God upon the one

hand and to man upon the other is a primal fact which no historical interpretations have been able to conceal. As we build on this we build on the only foundation which can be called Christian. But even when this foundation has been securely laid, the buildings erected upon it in the course of ages have been widely different. Wood, hay, and stubble have been freely used as material, and much of it has failed to stand the test which time has applied. There is need for very careful distinction between the fact of Christ given in the New Testament and those dogmatic interpretations of the fact which have been too often accepted as standards by the Christian Church. The Christian position is determined in the long-run by the attitude of the soul towards Jesus Christ, and not by acceptance of any of the intellectual interpretations of Him which have been from time to time in vogue. A man may accept every position of orthodoxy in regard to Jesus Christ, and yet be very far from the confession, " My Lord and

my God.” On the other hand, a man may find in Jesus Christ his Lord and Saviour, and may make Him “the Master-Light of all his seeing,” and at the same time be unable to accept many of the dogmas which the Church has counted necessary to salvation. Given the evangelic deposit of the Divine work and Person of Jesus Christ, a large liberty of interpretation must be conceded.

But it is here that the difficulties of the organised Churches begin. Christian theology at the present time is the result of a long and varied conflict. It is like one of those buildings which have grown up, not according to any preconceived plan, but by a series of additions and alterations, determined by the necessities of the hour. The heresies of the Church for the time being have again and again determined the process of theological reconstruction. The historic creeds are monuments of the victory of this party or of that over the assailants of the faith in their day. Under these circum-

stances they suffer necessarily, now from over-emphasis, and now from under-statement. They are often temporary and accidental in form, and while they usefully served the necessities of their time, they cannot without much straining be made to fit the intellectual needs of the Church for all time. On the basis of such an organisation as they present the thought of the Church becomes rigid where it ought to be elastic, and dead and incapable of growth where it ought to be most alive. The assumption that the Christian facts involve the whole superstructure of doctrine which has been built upon them, form and substance alike, is responsible for most of our present troubles. On the other hand, the trouble cannot be averted by any return to the bare facts of the Christian revelation which ignores the results of development through the ages. The effort to free Christianity from all dogmatic accretions has a tempting sound, but it is utterly futile in practice. There is something to be said for it only when it is con-

finer to protesting against the tendency to make all dogma a test of Christian truth. The developmental process involves the assumption that that which is given in primitive Christianity is capable of growth and expansion, a germ or seed of truth rather than the full-orbed idea. The real problem of to-day is not how the modern Church may be made to accept all the thought of the past, but how it may so use this as the better to enable it to interpret the Christian Gospel and the Person of the Christ in terms which the present age can understand.

Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
And not on paper leaves nor leaves of stone ;
Each age, each kindred, adds a verse to it,
Texts of despair, or hope, or joy, or moan.

In the process of theological reconstruction a necessary distinction must be drawn between Churches and individuals. It is comparatively easy for the individual to distinguish between faith in Christ and doctrines about Christ. His relation to

Jesus Christ is to him the source of life and light, and so long as it is maintained he is not supremely concerned with the intellectual explanations which may be given to it. Men may live healthy lives in entire ignorance of biology or of physiology. In the same way a knowledge of theology is not necessary for the life of the soul. With the Church, however, things are different. Some form of theology or of doctrinal statement is necessary, if not to the life, at least to the organisation of the Church. And Churches, as a rule, are slow to relate their intellectual exposition of the truth by which they live to the life itself. Hence a natural and ever-widening gulf between the intellectual position of the Churches and that of the individuals who compose them. The individual easily readjusts himself to new conditions; the Church is slow to move and difficult to persuade. This fact, however, makes it the more necessary that Churches should be freed from anything in the nature of an intellectual bondage. Opinion in this direc-

tion is, no doubt, ripening fast, and while in one way it seems to increase the present condition of unrest, in another it is showing us the surest mode of escape from it. Even in Churches that have long been bound to a form of creed men chafe at the restriction, and seek to escape from it by all manner of subterfuges and evasions, the moral effect of which is disastrous in the extreme. It is hardly too much to say that no branch of the Protestant Christian Church at the present time would attempt to express its beliefs in any form of words which was to be made binding on the consciences of men. Explanatory and declaratory statements of creed would be held allowable only as they must never be made a burden on tender consciences.

It must not be forgotten, however, that religion means life as well as faith, and that the intellectual interpretation of it cannot be kept apart from its practical expression. The theology by which a man lives may be a very different thing from

the theology which he expresses in his creed. Creed and conduct are, no doubt, very closely allied, but it is conduct that is for the most part the outcome of creed. In other words, a man only believes what he practises. Therefore the study of religious practice, of experience, of the life of God in the soul of a man, is as necessary and as useful as the study of the intellectual expression of the faith. The modern tendency to lay stress on the experimental and psychological in religion is a sign of the times, and is part of a healthy reaction against the over-dogmatism of the past. It is certainly a factor of the utmost importance in every attempt to deal with the present distress. The great words of Jesus Christ, "He that willeth to do His will shall know of the teaching," contain a rule of life and faith which the Christian Church would do well to remember and obey. In many evangelical circles there is an altogether unfounded suspicion of the ethical implications of the Christian

Gospel. But in a time of theological doubt and transition these become of the utmost value and afford the surest anchorage for the soul. The history of the Church supplies abundant and melancholy evidence of the fact that no exaction of rigid standards of orthodoxy will secure a high ideal of Christian life. It is by their fruits rather than by their thoughts that Christians are best known and judged. No one will accuse John Wesley of being indifferent to doctrinal forms or careless of orthodoxy, yet it is worth remembering that as long ago as 1792 he couched his definition of a Methodist, and therefore presumably of a Christian, in the following terms : “ The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or another, are all quite wide of the point. . . . Is thy heart right as my heart is with thine ? I ask no further question. Dost thou love and

serve God? It is enough. I give thee the right hand of fellowship.”

Here surely is the bold and Christian line for our Churches to take in the present crisis. The best answer to those who would win us away from faith in the full Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ is to set forth the power of that Gospel in the changed and fruitful lives of our Church members. The business of the Church is not so much to state the doctrine of God our Saviour as to adorn it, and the best weapons of her warfare are not the articles of a creed, but the fruits of the Spirit. So long as her faith works by “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” she has evidences which none can gainsay and of which she need never be ashamed.

Meanwhile the work of theological reconstruction must go steadily on. The deeper the spiritual life of the Churches the more eager will they be to find an intellectual expression for it in terms in-

telligible to the thought of the age. We must at all costs, however, avoid the fallacy of confounding religion with theology, which is much as though a man were to confound biology with life. No doubt biological science can do a great deal to make life more tolerable and more secure, but no man need pass an examination in it before he can be said to live. So a sane and reasonable theology can do a great deal for religion, though it cannot make religious men. But in commending our religion to the world it is very necessary that we should use the terms of current thought and life, always with the understanding that such terms are never final. The first and central duty of the Christian Church is to witness to the great Christian facts, man's guilt and God's grace and redemption in Jesus Christ, and to live the life. But next in order, both of importance and urgency, is to commend this Gospel to the world in intelligible terms. But this is not done if the facts are eviscerated of

all spiritual content in the process, or if they are pared down to suit the temper of a trifling and materialistic age. The Christian teacher is a prophet of God. He speaks to his time, as it were, from a vantage-point above it. He has learnt his lesson not amid the wrangling of the schools, but in the secret place of the Most High. Though he may come down to the marketplace and speak in the language of the people, he can never lose the sense of awe and of inadequacy, or descend to the commonplace. To interpret the ways of God to men requires intellectual equipment, as well as spiritual sense. We Christians believe in the Holy Spirit. We believe that God hath never left Himself without witness, and that He is speaking to the age in which we live. We believe, with Augustine, that "whatever is true, by whomsoever it is spoken, proceeds from the Spirit of God." If, therefore, we would become the mouthpieces of His word, we must first listen, and have the tongue of

them that are taught. Therefore, in all the seething thought of the age we can count nothing common or unclean. The wonderful discoveries of science, the vast hypothesis of evolution, the stricter methods of historical and literary criticism, the study of comparative religions, the rise of a new philosophy, all these are to us, not the works of the devil, but messages wherein he who will may catch the authentic voice of God. There is nothing here which can disturb a living Christian experience, or destroy the Christian facts; but there is much here to modify our intellectual expression of that experience, and our intellectual interpretation of those facts. The process which this involves is complex and arduous in the extreme, but it is one from which we must not shrink. Honestly and fearlessly followed out it can only bring us nearer to Him who is the truth. In any case, it means a revival of intellectual interest in the Christian faith, and such revival has often been a condition precedent

of a revival of religion itself. As Dr. Dale said long ago: "I believe that in all the great movements of religious reform that have permanently elevated the religious life of Christendom there has been a renewal of intellectual interest in the Christian revelation. Some forgotten aspects of the Gospel have been recovered; the theological definitions which had for a generation or two been a sufficient expression of the results at which human speculation had arrived concerning the great facts of revelation have been challenged and discredited, and the mind of the Church has been brought into immediate contact with the facts themselves; the methods which have determined the construction of theological systems have become obsolete, and the work of reconstruction has tasked the genius and the learning of the leaders of Christian thought; the central principles of the Gospel have received new applications to individual conduct, and to the organisation of social life: in all these ways a fresh

and keen intellectual interest has been excited in Christian truth, and the intellectual interest has deepened moral and spiritual earnestness." These are wise and weighty, and we venture to believe that they will prove prophetic words.

If the process of theological change is to become a help, rather than a hindrance, to the faith of the Churches, two conditions must be observed. The first of these is the cultivation of a spirit of sincerity, and the second is the maintenance of the good principle of toleration. On each of these a word needs to be said.

It would be a libel on our Churches and on Christian people generally to charge them with being consciously insincere. But to set up standards of belief, either in substitution for, or in addition to, standards of life and conduct inevitably leads to a certain lack of frankness in utterance. To make orthodoxy the password into a Christian community is to put a heavy strain on tender consciences. The mischief is clearly

seen in those creed-bound Churches where men are accustomed to give a tacit and general assent, with mental reservations, to propositions which they cannot candidly endorse. The thing is so common that the real evil of it is apt to be obscured. But the intellectual conscience of a Christian is far too delicate a thing to be played with in this way. Many Churches have wisely refused to make a creed "a picklock to a place," but they have not successfully evaded the difficulty in question. There are many men who feel themselves hampered by the intellectual limitations of the Churches in delivering their message. There is an impression abroad, whether warranted or not, that the Churches do not want to hear the plain truth, either as regards the intellectual interpretation of the Gospel or as regards its moral implications. In some respects the latter is perhaps a more serious hindrance than the former. And the feeling indicated is unquestionably responsible for the lack of the more cultured and intelligent

young men among candidates for the pulpit in these days. In name at least some Churches have always stood for a free pulpit, but the reality is sometimes sadly to seek. We are fully aware what the term "a free pulpit" should mean. We realise that it is a pulpit we are concerned with, and not a class-room or a platform. A pulpit means preaching, and preaching means a Gospel. But given the Gospel, given the evangelical message, our claim is that a man has not only a right, but a duty, to declare it in the terms in which it has found his own soul, and under which God has revealed it to him. This must not only be done with entire frankness on his part, but in a spirit of the humblest reverence, and with the tenderest regard for those who sit at his feet. The pathway of theological advance is strewn with wreckage caused by the cruel iconoclasm and arrogant unwisdom of some of those who have claimed to be pioneers. A free pulpit does not mean freedom to say what one

likes, and as one likes. It means rather liberty to tell God's truth in God's way. Given an observance of the Christian rule of charity, and a like respect for others' consciences as for one's own, and our Churches would be ready and anxious to receive the frankest possible exposition of the Gospel of the grace of God in the light of the new knowledge and the new intellectual standpoint of to-day. But the task is no easy one. Only those can successfully attempt it who by their moral and spiritual force have gained the confidence of the Churches, and whose prolonged and deep study of the problems involved has given them the right to speak.

But a further question remains. Even in these days of liberty our attitude towards those who differ from us, or who depart from the accepted standards on theological questions, leaves something to be desired. It is unfortunate that it should not be possible to discuss differences of view in matters of religion without acrimony and

bitterness. This is sometimes excused as being testimony to the vast importance of the issues involved. It is really unbelief. And among Christians no excuse can justify such departures from the rule of charity. Freedom without toleration is not a blessing, but a curse. There are Churches that were cradled in toleration. Can they still say with Cromwell, "In things of the mind we look for no compulsion but that of light and reason," and with Owen, "I believe that upon search it will appear that error hath not been advanced by anything in the world so much as by usurping a power for its suppression"? We are not likely at this time of day to revive any of the old material weapons of orthodoxy, but we are in danger of forgetting that it is possible even in Free Churches to create an atmosphere which may become a weapon of persecution and a means of suppressing the truth. Tares will always be found among the wheat, and the attempt to root them up prematurely is always perilous.

“ Let both grow together until the harvest.” Toleration springs not out of indifference to the truth, as is sometimes said, but out of the belief that God’s truth is too big a thing to be wholly expressed in any of our formulas.

In conclusion, we see no reason for panic or despair. The faith of the Churches is still fundamentally sound. In some quarters it may find forms of expression for itself against which every instinct in us rebels, but we may easily attach to these things too much importance. The duty of the moment is not to suppress any of the varied manifestations of the intellectual ferment of our day, but rather to return to the Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, to preach it in all its fullness, to live it out in our own experience, and to apply it to the needs of the world. Only by such experimental process shall we be able to discover that the foundation of God standeth sure. The spirit that should animate us in this should be that of the great father in the faith,

John Owen, expressed in his famous apostrophe, "Blessed Jesus ! we can add nothing to Thee, nothing to Thy glory ; but it is a joy of heart to us that Thou art what Thou art, that Thou art so gloriously exalted at the right hand of God. And we do long more fully and clearly to behold that glory according to Thy prayer and promise."

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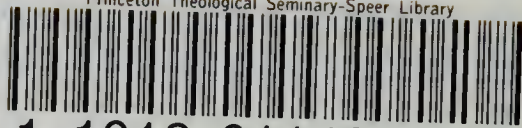
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